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MEMORIALS OF A MINISTRY

A SELECTION FROM THE DISCOURSES

OF

EDWARD A. THOMSON

FREE ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH, EDINBURGH

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

BY

PROFESSOR LAIDLAW, D.D.

NEW COLLEGE, EDINBURGH

EDINBURGH

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To

THE TWO CONGREGATIONS

OF

DUDHOPE FREE CHURCH, DUNDEE, AND FREE ST STEPHEN'S,

EDINBURGH

TO WHICH HE SUCCESSIVELY MINISTERED

THIS MEMORIAL VOLUME

Is respectfully dedicated.

PREFATORY NOTE.

THESE discourses represent the staple of Mr Thomson's preaching. They are printed almost exactly as they left his own pen. They are not Sermons prepared for special occasions, but are specimens of his ordinary pulpit work. From a large number equally suitable for publication these have been selected on a principle approved by himself, viz., that of presenting the treatment by him for Christian edification of a variety of topics. Their preparation in the shape in which they now appear occupied some of his later labours, even after he had ceased to preach. When preached, as all of them had been, their delivery was always accompanied by an earnest desire for spiritual fruit, and they are now committed to the press in the confidence that they will still continue to commend that Gospel of the Grace of God which their author so faithfully and lovingly proclaimed.

J. L.

EDINBURGH, *Nov.* 1891.

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ERRATA.

On page 149, 5th line from foot, *for* "severity and goodness,' *read* "severity and judgment."

On page 155, 7th line from foot, *insert* "is" *before* "thereby.'

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

EDWARD ANDERSON THOMSON was born at Edinburgh, on 5th September 1817. He was descended of a stock which, for several generations, had been planted there. His father was, in local phrase, a "Canogotian" *i.e.*, a public-minded citizen of the Canongate Burgh in the Scottish capital. His mother's "forbears" on both sides, also Edinburgh citizens, hailed, however, from the Borders, and from them he derived a large infusion of the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* so marked in that shrewd and vigorous race. The reminiscences of an intelligent Edinburgh boy, of the decade to which he belonged, included such incidents as the excitement attending the passing of the First Reform Bill, the great orations of Dr. Andrew Thomson, of St. George's, on the Abolition of Slavery, and some glimpses of the famous literary *coterie* whose centre had been Sir Walter Scott. The religious impressions of his boyhood were of a very definite kind. His parents were staunch Old Light Anti-burghers, members of the congregation in Davie Street, presided over successively by the two Drs. Thomas M'Crie, father and son. Of the elder M'Crie, the historian of Knox and Melville, he writes in a pamphlet on "The Union Question" (Edinburgh, 1868): "He was my minister. I was

brought up at his feet from my very infancy. I was a young man not far from twenty years of age, when he was so soon and so suddenly taken from us. All my church views—historical as well as scriptural—were formed under his teaching, were very specially moulded by his prayers, and they have been most fully confirmed by, as I think, a not unintelligent study of his writings." How early his own aims were fixed upon the ministry is not recorded, but about the age mentioned in this paragraph, he was teacher (then the usual road to the ministry) of what was known as Dr. Andrew Thomson's school, and was there brought into contact with the new minister of St. George's, Dr. Robert S. Candlish. During his University course, he distinguished himself in Sir William Hamilton's class, where his fellow-students were such men as John Cairns and A. Campbell Fraser. In 1840, he entered the Divinity Hall of the Original Secession Church under the tuition of Dr. Benjamin Laing, of Colmonell and of Dr. Thomas M'Crie, *secundus*, by that time his own pastor. He also voluntarily attended the Theological classes in the University, taught by Dr. Thomas Chalmers and Dr. David Welsh, giving thus early proof of the largeness of mind and breadth of vision, which carried him beyond denominational narrowness. "When I entered the Original Secession Hall a few years later," (says a life-long friend *) "his name was one of its choice memories as an able student, a great

* Rev. David Simpson, Free Church, Laurencekirk.

favourite with his Professors, and a trenchant critic of his fellow-students' discourses."

On 28th November 1843, he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Edinburgh Presbytery of Original Seceders. On 19th February 1844, he was called as its minister by the congregation of that body in Dundee, then worshipping in the Watt Institution Hall, and transferred later to the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Meadowside. But as he was about the same time called by the congregation at Kirriemuir ("Thrums") the decision was referred to the Synod. This having been given in favour of Dundee, he was there ordained on 15th August of the same year. During this part of his Dundee ministry, he was twice called to the second congregation of Kirkintilloch, but the Synod declined on both occasions to translate him. Reminiscences of that ministry still float in the memory and conversation of older members of Secession circles. While yet a young minister of that denomination he was looked upon as a preacher of great promise and attractiveness. His winning manner and appearance were much spoken of. One who has been long an honoured Missionary of the Free Church writes,*— "As a boy, I used to hear Mr. Thomson in the Original Secession Church, Arbroath. He was then minister of the congregation at Dundee belonging to that denomination. He was a great favourite with young and old as a preacher, with a pulpit manner quaint, yet im-

* The Rev. John Small, of Poona.

pressive, and a singularly attractive presence. Later, when at school in Dundee, I felt drawn to run over as often as possible to the Watt Institution, where Mr. Thomson's congregation then met. He was lecturing through the Book of Ruth, and his discourses were to my young mind most charming. He told me, years afterwards, in one of his merry moods, that he had been obliged to discontinue these lectures when he reached the 'courting' part, as he was then personally going through that course himself."

As the result of the "courtship" here alluded to, Mr Thomson was married, August 1848, to Miss Ann Wright, daughter of Mr Peter Wright, a well-known Edinburgh merchant-citizen, and a member, like his own parents, of the Davie Street congregation. Of this marriage there were born six children, two of whom died in infancy, and other two at the early ages of seven and ten years respectively. Both his own health and that of his wife were tried from time to time in no inconsiderable measure. But these sicknesses and "deaths oft" were by God's grace very fruitful in his personal religion and in his ministerial work. Of his life-partner, one friend expresses an estimate, in which all who knew her will concur—"For kindness of heart, for clearness of intellect, for trustworthiness of judgment, for rectitude of purpose, for allegiance to conscience, and adjustment of all the facts and bearings of a situation, so as to settle what was duty, I never knew a woman who surpassed her.

The combination of the higher departments of mind and character in her was quite exceptional. She had a splendid will-power which showed itself not in stubbornness, but in tenacity of purpose, laying hold upon herself, and keeping her loyal to what was right and true." Her almost life-long bodily afflictions were never allowed to interfere with her bravely fulfilled duties to her husband and her children. They never clouded her clear perception of realities in life and religion, and never quenched her interest in the Church of Christ, and in every good cause. Her public spirit and excellent judgment in all the questions discussed in the sphere to which she and her husband belonged, were not a little remarkable in one whose daily walk was necessarily so retired.

Mr Thomson's pastorate of the Original Secession Congregation in Dundee lasted from August 1844 to June 1852, when the Union took place of the Synod of United Original Seceders with the Free Church of Scotland. Some eight months after the Union of the denominations, Mr Thomson and his congregation were transferred to the congregation of Dudhope Free Church, where he continued to labour till October 1859. But the steps which led to this transition and amalgamation are of some historical importance. As, moreover, they gave occasion to the best known exertions of our friend in public affairs and ecclesiastical controversy, they deserve some detailed exposition.

An incident in his early life, related by himself,

concentrates attention upon the meaning of these public movements. One day his father taking him to a window in his Edinburgh house from which could be seen the spires of several of the city churches, and pointing to them, one by one, said, in reference to each, "That, and that is ours." As the lad asked in astonishment, "How can they be ours when we do not attend them?" the father explained that the prevailing party in the State Church had at various times forced the Seceders into their then position, but that, so soon as the Church should return to her constitutional practice, they would go back and enjoy their own again. The incident had a formative power over his future ecclesiastical course. No one among the ministers of the body to which he belonged held a more intelligent and consistent view of the position. He was a genuine Seceder, repudiating on the one hand the term "Dissenter," and on the other the title "Church," for his own ecclesiastical connection. Their proper designation was for him, "The Synod," or, in homelier phrase, "The Body," while "The Church" was the Church of Scotland. Secession was a temporary condition intended and destined to pass away. On this ground could be explained and vindicated even the humble character of their meeting-houses, so mistakenly attributed by those who are unaware of the facts to Puritanic rigidity of taste. The whole movement which follows illustrates some of the most characteristic features of Scottish Ecclesiastical History.

While the eighteenth century had seen repeated divisions and sub-divisions of these Presbyterian seceders from the Mother Church, first into Burghers and anti-Burghers, and then of each respectively into a New Light (or Voluntary) and an Old Light (or Constitutional) section, the reviving evangelicism of the early part of our own century had brought about a desire for reunions. The earliest of these was the formation, in 1820, of the New Light sections of both Burghers and anti-Burghers into a United Secession Synod. This body became in 1847 the present United Presbyterian Church, upon the accession to it of the "Relief" Seceders, who had existed in a separate connection from the time of their first leaving the Established Church in the middle of the preceding century. The Union of 1820 left a remnant of "Protesters," who, seven years later, joined themselves to the outstanding Constitutionalists or Old Light anti-Burghers, and thus formed (1827) the Synod of Original Seceders. In 1839 the other Constitutional body or Old Light Burghers, attracted by the rising evangelicism of the Church of Scotland, returned to their Mother Church by a large majority. Here again, as in almost all these coalitions, there was a remanent fraction, but in the spirit of reunion then prevalent this minority (with a few exceptions) merged itself in the Original Secession Synod; and thus was formed, in 1842, the United Original Secession Synod, the body of which our friend was a minister in Dundee. Scarcely had his

ministry there commenced when the movement for further reunion began to affect this body of Seceders also, and they prepared to follow in the footsteps of their brethren, the Old Light Burghers who had rejoined the State Church, as above described. But their action, though similar, was marked by a difference of some import. The principle of both Reunions was the same, and in both cases was honourable and consistent. Their fathers and founders, when compelled to secede from the Church Established, had appealed to the first faithful and reforming General Assembly of that Church, when in God's providence such should arise. On the famous "Ten Years' Conflict" (1833-43) within the State Church, the eyes of these Seceders had been fixed with absorbing interest. Somewhat prematurely, perhaps, the section of them already indicated concluded that they had found the Reforming Church to which their fathers looked forward, in one whose General Assembly had passed successively the Acts giving a place in her Church Courts to all ministers of congregations, and the Act giving to the people a veto on the election of their pastors. The United Original Seceders had been more cautious, but were now from year to year becoming more confident that a great ecclesiastical crisis was at hand, which should more than realise the hopes they had inherited.

Accordingly, when the crisis had come, and the first General Assembly of the Free Church met in Tanfield Hall in May 1843, these Seceders appeared at it by

chosen representatives. The report which these carried back to their brethren was filled with an undoubting conviction that the "free, reforming Assembly" had now been found, not indeed within the State Church, but in that which they regarded as the real mother of their own tribes—the Church of Scotland Free. Accordingly, negotiations for Union may be said to have begun from the famous Disruption Day, and, by the time our friend took his place in the Courts of his own Ecclesiastical Communion, the movement for its Union with the Free Church was in full stream. How that Union should not have taken place in the first years of the Free Church's existence is not easy to comprehend or to explain, except by the characteristic "dourness" of the Scottish Ecclesiastic, and his tendency to stickle upon every item of objection which might have even the colour of being conscientious. It was argued that though the Free Church had done well in coming out from the bondage of the State, she had not yet advanced beyond the defective position of the "Revolution Settlement"—had not fully acknowledged the gains of the Second Reformation in the half-century preceding; and above all, had not adopted as her own the Covenanted Obligations of that glorious period—obligations to which Old Light Seceders had clearly claimed to adhere. Such was the apple of discord tossed about between divergent parties in the Synod for a few years, and during which the movement for Union hung fire. The obstacle was removed by

the Free Church Assembly of 1851 adopting an "Act and Declaration," ever since prefixed to the Authorised Edition of her Subordinate Standards, in which the desiderated positions are substantially taken up by the Free Church herself. Already had the United Original Secession Synod of 1850 entertained with considerable favour an overture for the resumption of the Union movement. "Mr Thomson, who had then," says the patient chronicler of his Church's Annals,* "the dew of youth upon him, in an energetic and rapidly delivered speech, moved to appoint a Committee to renew negotiations with the Free Church, with a view to ascertain whether a Union can be honourably effected and on Scriptural grounds." Though not explicitly adopted, this motion expressed the spirit of many ministers and laymen, and the immediate effect of the Free Church Assembly's Act of the following year was to produce a change of mind in favour of Union on the part of some leading Seceders who had hitherto opposed it, conspicuously of the Rev. Mr White of Haddington, Editor of the Original Secession Magazine. A Conference of Ministers and Elders was held in January 1852, to prepare for decisive action at the ensuing Synod. At the Synod's meeting on 27th April following, a motion was tabled by Dr Thomas M'Crie adopting the largely signed overture for Union. This overture declared that the

* Rev. D. Scott, D.D. in "Annals of the Original Secession Church," Edinburgh 1886.

Free Church "undoubtedly represents . . . the Church to which our fathers appealed;" that this Court "do now recognise her accordingly," and "do affectionately and respectfully propose to unite with her on the basis of the Westminster Standards." It was supported among others by a speech from Mr Thomson in which he argued that the crisis of their history as an Ecclesiastical body had come, that they had no longer any Scriptural or Constitutional ground for remaining aloof from the Church of Scotland as now represented by the Free Church, and that unless they took the step now proposed, they would be shut up to change their whole line of action, and organise themselves into a new, distinct, independent Church, having no historical or constitutional relation to any of the other Churches in the country. The debate was concluded by a vote taken early in the morning of Thursday, 29th April, when Dr M'Crie's motion became the finding of the Synod by a majority of one. The clerical majority was five, and, reckoning the absent members who afterwards adhered to the decision, some twenty-two or twenty-three Ministers acceded to Union, whilst thirteen chose to remain in a state of Secession. The negotiations were briskly carried on during the few following weeks, were finally adjusted at a special meeting,—its last—of the Synod, on 24th May, and the Union consummated in the meeting of the Free Church General Assembly on June 1st, where the Synod was received through a representative deputa-

tion. Mr Thomson was one of the five clerical members of this deputation, whose reception was celebrated in a scene seldom surpassed in the history of the Free Church for enthusiasm and *éclat.*

Immediately following the Division of the United Original Synod on 29th April, a peculiar incident took place, involving the action of the Dundee congregation, and illustrating the combined energy and gentleness of its minister's character. The protesting minority of the Synod had formed themselves into an Independent Synod on the forenoon of the very day in the early hours of which the vote had been taken. Some keen adherents of the same views in the Dundee congregation conceived that they had the mind of that congregation with them, and procured the appointment of a minister of the Protesting Synod to occupy their pulpit on the Sabbath following (2nd May). This was done without notice given to Mr Thomson. When he stepped out of his vestry, accordingly, on Sabbath morning, he found the pulpit pre-occupied, and the services about to begin. After as due and formal a protest as the circumstances allowed, he withdrew in order to avoid disturbance, followed by the great majority of his congregation, and proceeded with the usual services in the open air on a space of ground beside the church. When opportunity was obtained the following day to sift the whole case, things became clear. The adherents to the views of the Protesting Synod turned out to be an obvious minority.

Mr Thomson and the majority of his congregation fell in with the decision of their own Synod; and upon the Constitutional steps being taken a month later, they joined the Free Church along with the other congregations of their denomination who followed this course. In this curious instance of attempted Intrusion and Deforcement, Mr Thomson acted with becoming decision, yet with much wisdom and forbearance, and in after-years maintained even his personal friendship with those who had taken part in the misguided movement of the minority.

The neighbouring Free Church congregation of Dudhope having, towards the close of this same year (1852), lost through death a very popular preacher and pastor (Rev. W. Stewart, Senior), turned their eyes towards the quondam Secession minister, whose esteem was in all the churches of the locality. The Free East Church, Forfar, had meanwhile addressed a call to Mr Thomson, but the Dudhope folks craved leave to proceed, and having unanimously elected him, the Presbytery sustained the call from within their own bounds, on the understanding that the Meadow-side congregation (as his then charge was called) should be amalgamated with that of Dudhope. This was done. The communicants, elders, and deacons who chose to go with Mr Thomson—seventy-eight persons in all—were transferred, and this special Union, like the larger one of the two denominations represented in it, was a complete success. "They

were," in their minister's own words, spoken some years later, "no more twain but one." He was inducted to the pastorate of Dudhope on 17th February 1853, and to this united congregation he continued to minister for fully six years and a half with much acceptance, and very considerable financial and other advantages to the flock. This was a period of his public life, however, in which some delicacy of his physical constitution occasioned him more trouble than ever before or after. The onerous nature of the charge, and the strain involved in preaching in so large a building, proved to be beyond his strength at the time, and forced him to tender his resignation. The honourableness and generosity with which he relinquished his recognised claim on their resources greatly intensified the regret of his congregation. He was loosed from his charge at a meeting of Dundee Presbytery, 14th September 1859, amid a scene of feeling creditable to all parties. The Presbytery, in parting with him, recorded "their deep sense of the loss they sustain in being deprived of the services of a brother so deservedly esteemed by them as a member of Presbytery, not only for his faithful, laborious, successful, and able services as a minister of the Gospel, but for his singular gifts and intelligence as a Church ruler."

This Dundee ministry of fifteen years in all, forming the first and briefer section of his public life, was one which met with much acceptance and was highly

esteemed by the whole Christian community among whom it was exercised. Not a few proofs of the spiritual success of that ministry are known. There are letters in our possession detailing instances of persons of various ranks of life who, under his Dudhope ministry especially, found salvation. No doubt that aspect of his preaching was prominent then, as all through, which made it largely doctrinal. It might be characterised as "more feeding than awakening." But the relation of evangelical doctrine in the pulpit to the spiritual life of the hearers is felicitously touched in one of his letters. Quaintly enough, he compares the difference between preaching which "feeds" and that which merely "rouses" to that between putting coal on a fire, and using only the bellows. Where the preference must lie is clear. "Put cold, black coal upon a good fire and it will soon be red-hot, but you will only blow the fire out if you don't put on coal. Feed the fire and the engine will go. Does not evangelical preaching meet us where we are, yet not to keep us where we are? No! but to lift us up, to quicken and sanctify us for God. . . . I know that any preaching of mine which appears to have been blessed has much more frequently been the doctrinal than any other kind. But, of course, there is an abstract kind of evangelical preaching which counts for very little. All preaching should bear upon our hearts. It is not much worth if it fails of that." A happy phrase of his correspondent may be adopted

as the characteristic of this earlier ministry, and indeed of the whole, accompanied as it is with his own modest comment. "Thanks for your idea of a *beloved acceptability* in preference to a *general popularity*. I suspect there is a snare in both ways of it. I am not sure which is the safer. There are some natures which would misuse anything. I am rather gifted in that direction." The present Free Church minister of Dudhope * says that for many years after the actual connection had ceased, Mr Thomson's hold on his former people was a remarkable testimony to the tenacity and affectionateness of his nature. Never a bereavement befel them without letter of sympathy from their former pastor, and hardly ever a funeral but Mr Thomson's presence at it in Dundee, notwithstanding distance and fatigue, was the expected proof of his sympathy and remembrance.

For about a year after the resignation of his Dundee charge, Mr Thomson undertook no stated work, but October of 1860 found him returned from travels in Italy, and resident in his native city, with vigour so much restored as to make it safe for him to resume preaching. The Rev. F. C. Gillies of Free St Stephen's, Edinburgh, had about this time suffered so much in health, after a laborious and fruitful pastorate, that his office-bearers resolved to secure the services of an ordained assistant. With the cordial concurrence of

* Rev. Andrew Inglis.

pastor and people the appointment was offered to Mr Thomson, who, to the great satisfaction of all parties, accepted what he regarded as a temporary engagement. So entirely successful did the engagement prove, so cordial and loving was the intercourse between minister and helper, that a year had scarcely elapsed when a proposal was made to have the assistant associated permanently with Mr Gillies, as his colleague and successor. The sudden death of the senior, in January 1862, rendered prosecution of the application for a colleague unnecessary. But at the earliest possible date, Mr Thomson was unanimously and cordially elected to the vacant pulpit, and on 27th March was inducted pastor in full charge, a sphere in which he continued to labour, with only slight interruptions, for a period of eight-and-twenty years.

The congregation had a somewhat peculiar history. It had been formed a few years after the Disruption as the result of a movement initiated by such well-known citizens as Sir James Forrest of Comiston, Sheriff Maitland Heriot, and Dr Alexander Wood. At the instance of 161 petitioners, among whom were the late Mr Henry Paul, and the still surviving Dr Graham Weir, the Presbytery settled as first minister of the congregation, the Rev. Dr James Buchanan, who had held service among them at a preparatory stage for some time. The connection in this form lasted, however, only two months, Dr Buchanan having been appointed a professor in the New College in May

1845. The Rev. Francis Gillies, of Rattray, was next called to the charge, was inducted in February 1846, and continued to minister with much acceptance for sixteen years. In the later part of Mr Gillies' ministry and the earlier part of Mr Thomson's, the *personnel* of the session and congregation was not a little remarkable. Dr Binny Webster, the founder of the Cunningham lectureship and other Free Church benefices, Professor Henderson of medical fame, Mr Norman Macbeth, artist, and many other public men, might be named. Any one who knew prominent Edinburgh citizens, by head-mark, could not fail to be struck by their presence, as one looked round the congregation which in those days met in Free St Stephen's church. There might be seen the saintly General Anderson, the tall figure and quick glance of his church's devoted servant, Hugh Handyside; the gracious and beaming face of good John Logan; the exquisite countenance of Sheriff Cleghorn,—itself a benediction on any company —not to speak of honourable women not a few, of the highest intelligence and principle, whose character and activities were a boon to the Church and to society. In the pulpit and pastorate of such a flock, our friend was in his right place. They had congregated themselves in firm adherence to Free Church principles and ardent appreciation of evangelical teaching. Their third minister fully maintained the pulpit reputation, and public testimony of his warmly evangelical predecessors. Among such a galaxy of office-bearers and workers,

his gifts of pastoral visitation, and of enthusiastic Christian friendship found fitting scope. No pastor could have been more happily mated with a people, nor people with pastor, than in this instance, and the cordiality of their union remained unbroken to his dying day.

The usual vicissitudes of congregational life befel the flock in the years that followed. During Mr Thomson's ministry, especially its first ten or twelve years, the membership was considerably increased. During the same period the debt on the Church buildings was extinguished. Twenty-eight elders and forty-six deacons were at various periods inducted into office, and various associations formed for congregational and other purposes. On the erection of Stockbridge Free Church in 1869, a large portion of St Stephen's parochial territory was alienated to the new charge, and naturally enough the Free Church community of the neighbourhood ceased to supply fresh accessions to the older and more distant Church. The communion roll was in consequence somewhat reduced after this date, and the funds slightly suffered, though not in the same proportion. The decade, 1864-1874, was also one which saw the removal by death of a large proportion of the men who had formed the congregation, and who graced its earlier years. But the attractions of the pulpit and pastorate continued substantially to replete it with able and active supporters. To the very end of Mr Thomson's ministry it was also a gathering-place

of students and future ministers of the Free Church; and among the pulpit assistants from time to time employed under him were not a few who have now taken honourable places in the service of the Christian community in various parts of the world. A marked feature of his St Stephen's ministry all along was his unwearied labour for the welfare of young men, and his consequent influence over them. In addition to his constant and keen interest in the Fellowship and Literary Associations, he used to give much time and thought to the peculiar needs of his divinity students. Of these there were sometimes as many as ten or twelve attending together upon his ministry. It was his custom to associate these with himself into a Preaching Society meeting once a month during the college session. Each member had to preach before the Society and have his performance carefully criticised both as to matter and manner. That exercise was occasionally varied by the giving out of a text on which a condensed sermon-outline had to be written down on the spot by the members with a view to subsequent comparison and discussion. Those who enjoyed this privilege can testify that to these exercises, as well as to Mr Thomson's pulpit example and personal influence, they can trace many of the most fruitful impulses of their student days.

The same years brought severe vicissitudes in the pastor's own personal and family history. Of the deaths of his four children already alluded to, two had

taken place shortly before his leaving Dundee, and the other two shortly after his settlement in Edinburgh. These family bereavements culminated towards the latest years of his St Stephen's pastorate in the death of their mother, after long suffering borne with much Christian patience and resignation. Amid the many domestic afflictions which befel his flock—an unusual number of them the subject of pulpit references, given in the little volume named below [1]—one can feel how much the counsels and consolations addressed to his people came from the heart of one who had himself been tried and yet "comforted" of God. Several considerable absences from pastoral and pulpit duty occurred, from occasional ill-health, but the pulpit was usually occupied by reliable and relished assistants. During one furlough as many as four young ministers (sons of the congregation itself) supplied the pastor's place. These absences were also in several instances profitably occupied by him in foreign travel and ministration. In 1876-77, by appointment of the Free Church Continental Committee, he for three months conducted the Presbyterian services at Rome, as on a previous season he had served at Interlaken. In 1880 he was absent for about four months on a visit to the United States of America, on which occasion he acted as a delegate of the Free Church to the General Presbyterian Council which met that year at Philadelphia. On his own account he extended his tour to the far

[1] "Historical Notices of Free St Stephen's, Edinburgh," edited by Mr Thomson.

West, where he made many warm friendships, and preached in many pulpits, especially of the United Presbyterian Church of that country, a body to which, from their ecclesiastical leanings, his earlier reputation as a Seceder minister specially commended him. Visits more entirely of the nature of the pastor's ordinary furlough were paid at various times to Sweden, Holland, and other European countries, and were some of them made available for Gospel work.

In the Presbyterial and other public work of the Free Church Mr Thomson took a well-known place. As might have been expected from his earlier career, he was a prominent advocate of Ecclesiastical Union. The negotiations carried on from 1863 to 1873 by the three leading Non-established Presbyterian Churches in Scotland had his cordial and active support. He repeatedly spoke in the Church Courts on the Union side. Two at least of these speeches were issued in pamphlet form,—one in 1868, the other in 1870. The former especially is marked by singular force of debate. After acutely and firmly stating the much misunderstood and often misquoted positions of the elder Dr M'Crie on the Voluntary Controversy, he proceeds to pour effective ridicule on the idea that State Endowments are a permanent condition of the Church's being or well-being. "In a Christian country like ours," he said, "with our people able and willing freely to support the ordinances of the Gospel, for the Church, no longer an infant, but grown up to woman-

hood, to be still given out to nurse on the breasts of such nursing fathers and mothers (in the sense put upon a favourite text) is just intolerable. It is time she were weaned." He closed his speech with a prediction which, in the opinion of not a few, has been too accurately fulfilled. "The Free Church," he held, "was, in these negotiations, upon her trial, whether she would maintain her claim to be the true Scottish Church of the Scottish Reformation in no sectarian sense; whether she would prove it by allowing the others, who had been at an earlier period driven into a state of secession, to rally round her as their rightful centre of re-union. Should she fail to do so," he said, "God may yet save Scotland, but the day will be lost to the Free Church, and for many a year to the cause of Christ, in our land, as entrusted by Him to this Church." When, in 1876 (three years after the larger scheme of Union had ceased to be prosecuted), the Reformed Presbyterian Church united with the Free Church, Mr Thomson rejoiced in the event as a further exemplification of the historical and constitutional principle on which he and his brethren had acted in the Union of 1852. It is often supposed, by those who are imperfectly acquainted with their history, that the Covenanters and Seceders of Scotland were schismatics or separatists, breakers-up of Church unity. No mistake can be greater. By their original principles they held themselves bound to seek the reconstruction of the Scottish Church. There were

days, no doubt, when they held aloof from what seemed to them partial and premature settlements of Church questions in Scotland. But they were true to the aim of Union and Uniformity, which had been a watch-word of the Second Reformation. No better proof of the genuine Constitutionalism of the Free Church movements for re-union could be adduced than that they received the cordial support of men like Mr Thomson and his brethren on the one hand, and of Reformed Presbyterians on the other, men whose views on such questions were rooted in the Second Reformation, and nurtured on full and faithful assimilation of its principles. The historian of these movements, and of the opposition which was offered to them, will have no difficulty by-and-bye in perceiving which was really the constitutional party in the Union controversy.

In some slighter controversies which followed the cessation of the negotiations for Union, Mr Thomson was not unusually associated with those whom he had opposed before. Indeed on all such questions as these concerning Confessional Revision, or the treatment of modern Biblical Criticism, he was to be found, as might have been expected, on what is called the Conservative side. A lecture on "Revision of the Confession" in 1878, mainly occupied with strictures on the position of the Rev. David Macrae (now of Dundee), then a U.P. minister at Gourock, and a pamphlet (Speech) on "Uncertain Theology in the Colleges of the Free

Church, 1880" survive as proofs of his continued activity in these public questions, and indicate the position he held upon them. In his appearances as a debater, of which these papers are the record, as well as in all public speech, he was bright, animated and quick-witted, keen to a degree, yet frank and generous, winning almost equal acceptance from opponents and from friends. His brethren of the Presbytery, in recording his faithful attendance on their meetings, and his conscientious share in their discussions, say of him truly and happily, "that he always expressed himself with the decision and warmth of convictions which were loyal to all that is noblest in the national and ecclesiastical traditions of Scotland."

In the midst of a laborious pastorate, and the abundant discharge of his duties as an ecclesiastic, Mr Thomson also found time to exercise his pen on various Biblical themes. The preponderance of the doctrinal element in his pulpit teaching has been already noted, but the exegetical was also largely present, and his mind had a strongly critical bent. The best of his printed productions belong to these latter departments, and two of them have attracted considerable attention. "The Four Evangelists: with the Distinctive Characteristics of their Gospels" was first published in 1868 (Edinburgh, Clark), was republished in America, and in 1887 again in this country, finally reaching a fifth edition. This book is a bright and scholarly representation of the distinctions

and peculiarities of the Four Gospels and is marked by much ingenuity and sharp-sightedness. Its characterisations may be occasionally minute and overstrained, but they are full of life and interest. A series of papers on "The New Testament use of the Saviour's Names" was partly contributed to the *Family Treasury*" (Edinburgh, 1881), and partly to the *Evangelical Repository* of Pittsburgh in 1888. It is marked, in an even greater degree, by its author's faculty of almost microscopic exactitude of observation. This careful Biblical "Study" was revised by Mr Thomson and prepared for the press during the last months of his life. It would form a welcome booklet to those who weigh the words of Scripture as choice gold. Both these productions were very heartily received on the other side of the Atlantic. Soon after the appearance of the American edition of the "Four Evangelists" and his own visit to that continent, the degree of "Doctor Divinitatis" was conferred upon him (June 1881), by the Faculty of Monmouth College, Illinois, under powers conveyed in their Charter from the Legislative Assembly of that State. From this time on, he was usually addressed as "D.D." by his numerous American correspondents, although he never used the honour in his own country, nor was its existence generally known on this side. "It was a great pleasure to me," writes Dr M. M. Gibson, First U.P. Church, San Francisco, "to be in the society of Dr Thomson. He and I received the

Honorary title from the same College, and I always addressed him as he deserved; no one had a better right to the honour. I know the ground he held in keeping the distinction from being made public 'that so many others,' he said, 'more worthy than he were without it.' That showed the character of the man. I recognised him as one of the ablest and most faithful ministers of the Free Church. To his well trained and discriminating mind, all the nice distinctions in our Reformed faith were as clear as the sunbeam. His preaching was sweet with honey from the rock. It was strong, convincing, comforting, full of the 'unction from the Holy One.'"

As might have been expected, it was mainly in pulpit preparation that our friend's heart and mind were exercised in the way of production. Gifted with much fluency in *extempore* expression, with an almost perfect command, *memoriter*, of the English Bible, with abundant emotion, and full flow of spiritual life, he was naturally the sort of man who might have held forth from the pulpit, after the ideal of those preachers "who toil not, neither do they spin." So far was this from being his fashion, that he literally never preached without the most conscientious and punctual labour. Every sermon was written out, in earlier years committed to memory for the pulpit, in later life—during the whole of his Edinburgh ministry certainly—read, but read with an immensity of *verve* which gave it the effect of animated speech. To say that his pulpit

preparation was careful and conscientious is to understate the fact. He lived for his pulpit. He thought and spoke of almost nothing else in working hours. Even his leisure days and holiday seasons were often spent in constructing sermons and mapping out series of pulpit exercises. Whenever he made a congenial, ministerial friendship, he would lead his friend into this field. "From the time of our first acquaintance onwards," says one of these, "we seldom met without some part of our time being devoted to talking over and comparing notes on pulpit work. Texts, outlines, expositions, and sometimes whole compositions, coming under review. The truth is the main burden of our intercourse consisted in the consideration of Biblical topics bearing on the pulpit. Even in our last interview, shortly before his death, he told me of what he had been doing, and what he would wish to do in this line, if spared. His devotion to his pulpit work—how thoroughly he carried out the Apostolic injunction, 'meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all,' will never be fully known, I am persuaded, till we stand before the throne."

"All his life," writes the friend who has just been quoted, "he took a great interest in Psalmody. We recal the gusto with which at family worship he sang in his clear resonant voice! At one time he was Convener of the Sub-Committee of the General Assembly's Committee on Psalmody. As such he had charge

of the 'Versions of the Psalms,' and did an immense amount of hard work. He was anxious for a large variety of metres, and also for verbal expression, as close to the Original as possible. With these objects in view, among other means, he furnished himself, at the outset, with as many versions of the Psalms, published in Britain and America, as he could discover. Then he set himself to compare, select, and arrange, so as to compile as good a version as possible. I can testify to the earnestness and assiduity with which he wrought at this; for month after month, when I was attending the committees, he and I have sat up night after night, working at it, till far into the morning. Quite in keeping with the above, is the following incident, which he used to tell with extraordinary emotion. A lady was dying. He went to visit her. Her attendants told him that she was in her last sleep, unconscious, and that he need not speak. He went forward, saw the eyelids closed, and the passive look of death. Leaning over the dying face, he whispered—

"'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.'

Immediately, with eyes still shut, the departing one, almost interrupting, rejoined—

"'He only my Salvation is,
And my strong rock is He,
He only is my sure defence;
I shall not moved be.

" 'In God my glory placed is,
And my Salvation sure;
In God the Rock is of my strength,
My Refuge most secure.'"

—PSALM lxii. 6, 7.

"After describing the scene, and reciting the words, with tears in his eyes, he broke out in one of those explosive utterances, so characteristic of him, 'How much better are the Psalms than the Hymns! There's nothing like the Psalms!"

His devotional faculty as manifest in the pulpit and in less public gatherings, was often noted, and implied a deeply personal and spiritual exercise of the same. "I may say I envied him his gift in prayer; so full of what he himself would have called 'unction.' His whole being seemed to pray,—thought, affection, and desire, fused and blended by the Spirit, came from his lips, in the form of petitions, like a 'holy oil.' His prayers brought one very near to God, made one feel very tender, and sometimes as if in a place the Spirit was brooding over. And the same devotional qualities always characterised his preaching when at his best. He never preached so well as when preaching directly of Christ. Then that indefinable something, which gave him his individuality and charm were unfailingly present, and that something seemed to lie in his losing himself in his Master and reflecting His image." The friend already quoted, on p. 5, witnesses to the same effect. "I had no meeting with Mr Thomson from boyhood, until our return from India on first furlough.

Having settled in Edinburgh for the winter, we went to several of the churches without feeling drawn to any until I recalled the fact that my old friend was now minister of Free St Stephen's. We went, and found indeed the refreshing and upbuilding which a missionary so much needs after long absence from home. I reckoned Mr Thomson in several respects the best of our Free Church preachers in Edinburgh, and in addition to the genuine food which he brought to his flock, his sermons were lit up with true eloquence—an eloquence all his own. How truly excellent too was the devotional part of the service. I have heard nothing more truly spiritual or elevating than the few words of his opening prayer, or his brief expositions of the Psalms." A younger hearer about the same period of his ministry says:—"His sermons and expositions, so full of information and practical help, were well appreciated wherever he was known. But there were those of us who drew our choicest food from his class and his prayer-meeting 'talks.' I allowed nothing to prevent my attendance upon either. In class his teaching was careful and exact, but never dry; he used few illustrations, and his personal appeals were rare, and always spoken under deep feeling. I can still hear the tender pleading tones of his closing words at the last class meeting of the session, sixteen or more years ago,—'And now, if ye will deal kindly and truly with my Master, tell me, and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.' In

prayer-meeting addresses, he gave rein
quaint, racy, imagination, as he never did
formal occasions. Many no doubt wi
memory the life-like pictures he drew
Apostolic History, and the most laughable
of St Luke's narrative into nineteenth
guage; as when he described Lydia's as a
George Street business; the contention b
and Barnabas as a 'falling out among
aries'; or discussed the 'indignation m
Trades Council of Silversmiths at Eph
these word-pictures were mere setting
varied practical teaching; we were sent
quiet hour spent in the 'homelike little
with new strength and courage for to-m
and temptation, or, if not, surely our p
to blame."

These gifts of exposition and dev
require always a congregation, or even a
to call them forth. They were at the c
of that other gift, so essential to the tr
faculty of personal sympathy. One of
as a Christian worker in a peculiarly
had frequent occasions of proving thi
ministry, writes:—"I remember well
to Mr Thomson for advice in a time
anxiety. Intimate as we were, it was
and ask to see him. He received m
fatherly manner, and, after a little ge
drew
confidence for
older nor wi

tion, I ventured to ask whether he thought it better to fight our difficulties alone, than to confide in a friend. After a pause, he gave it as his opinion that we should carry our burdens directly to God, who alone could lighten them. However, he must have re-considered my question, for meeting me at a friend's house that same evening, he drew me aside, and whispered, 'I'll be at home, and alone, to-morrow morning at ten o'clock.' I found him then, and always, most helpful; not by way of answering questions or of clearing away doubts, but by sheer fellow feeling, by the force of his own strong faith, and more than all, I think, by his importunate prayers. . . . I had a great deal of personal help from my pastor, both through correspondence, and, when at home, through conversation. His visits were generally paid in the evening, when he would take a cup of tea with us 'just for communion.' Then would follow a lively discussion on some doctrinal point upon which I was supposed to be 'unsound,' or the explanation of an obscure passage of Scripture, or a chapter of Scottish Ecclesiastical History, upon which subject he con sidered me lamentably ignorant; or, best of all— quiet talk over some phase of Christian life. I wou have been satisfied to listen to hi r hours, but and in this I think Mr Thomson w ost unique, his power of sympathy was so gr t he drew companion to speak freely, giving ence for c fidence, appearing at the time nei r nor wi

and applying equally to himself and to the listener any practical hints he suggested. I was deeply touched upon one occasion, many years ago, when in a more than usually communicative mood, I told him of some mental difficulty which was harassing me. He said very little in reply; indeed, I was surprised at his silence. But the next time we met, he said—'You did not think me cold, did you? The truth is in trying to put myself into your position, I began to wonder whether you could by any possibility be right.' Who would not give much for this power of losing self in another's sorrows or perplexities?"

By the autumn of 1886, the afternoon of life began in our friend's case to be marked by its gathering shadows, and it was deemed advisable to strengthen the pastorate of Free St. Stephen's through the services of a colleague and successor.

The steps taken, facilitated by the pastor's cordial concurrence and characteristic generosity, resulted in the ordination, upon the 15th December 1887, of the Rev. W. A. Sim, whose career as a St. Andrews and Aberdeen student was one of great distinction, and whose literary accomplishments and pulpit gifts are of a unique nature. The harmonious settlement of a colleague was to the senior minister a matter of the highest satisfaction; and his disappointment was proportionately great when, two years and a half afterwards, the connection was severed by Mr. Sim seeing

it to be his duty to accept a call addressed to him by the English Presbyterian congregation at Sale, Manchester.

Mr. Thomson's closing years were greatly blessed and sustained by his second marriage. In August 1889, he was united to Helen E. Logan, only daughter of his beloved friend and elder, John Logan, W.S., who had departed five years before, at the ripe age of ninety-one. Mrs. Thomson was well fitted to enter into the very heart of her husband's ministry and work, as one who had herself long enjoyed his pastoral care. Enclosing to the present writer various communications, public and private, bringing out the strong mutual attachment between pastor and flock, she adds, "The sympathy he had with all his people in their joys and sorrows, and the trouble he took to find situations for some, to procure aid for others from benevolent Societies, to get children into hospitals, &c., were never ending. When any of his people came to see him, it struck me as remarkable how he remembered all about their relations, and how the young people of the family were employed. He had stated subjects for prayer every evening, and he never omitted them. His prayers for his relations and friends, particularly any in distress were touchingly earnest. Mine he prayed for as if they were his own. On Sundays, when not at church, he went through, when able, the full service, praying and singing, I reading aloud a sermon. At Roslin, we had this service nearly every

Sabbath in the garden. His brightness and hopefulness in the midst of all his sufferings were wonderful, and his mind was always active. He was never unemployed except when in severe pain."

A touching specimen of his epistolary vein and his loving watchfulness to use good moments, is this extract from a letter to his only brother Mr. Thomas Thomson, of West Calder, written after his own last illness had begun. "Of late I have been thinking a great deal of the old times, when we were all together in East Register Street. Many a scene have I pictured out in the old kitchen, and the various rooms, but all is past 'like the baseless fabric of a vision.' Father, Mother, Ann, and Betsy are gone, and now only you and I are to the fore. I have been ever so often in Davie Street too, filling up all the seats, and there is not one left alive that I know of. (Of course I don't include those younger than myself.) Where are they all? Were it not for the hope of the Gospel, I would break down. But I cannot think of God becoming incarnate, and making atonement in His own person, without believing that the efficacy of His grace will be magnified in the eternal glory of His redeemed. As these are all sinners without exception, I do hope that our dear ones with ourselves may be all found among them. Many a time I see you and my own dear chattering boys—one in each hand—going along the Perth Road, (Dundee) to the church on Sabbath afternoon. Is all the past written in dust? Perish the

thought! No! No! Life and immortality have been brought to light by the Gospel. Let us look up. Now I am going to write as many letters as I can, so must content myself with this mere expression of my brother's affection for yourself and Jane, and a Good New Year to all of you. I am yours, with all love. —EDWARD."

From about the time this letter was written, the disease, which had now set in, gradually increased in the severity of its attacks, and the tender ministrations of his loving partner—discharged with extraordinary fidelity—were almost incessantly drawn upon. The chamber of suffering into which his heavenly Father now withdrew him was at times like a heated furnace, his protracted ailments giving rise to recurrent paroxysms of pain; at other times there was respite. For three months, during his last summer, spent, as has been mentioned, in the country near Edinburgh, his strength so far rallied as to admit of occasional short walking exercise, and attendance at public worship. During the whole of his retirement, he prayed earnestly for recovery, if so be he might do something more for the Master. He worked as well as prayed, with restoration to usefulness in view, writing fresh sermons, or re-writing some of those which appear in this volume. Several discourses thus prepared are endorsed "St Stephen's," with a blank space left for the date of delivery. How thoroughly alive to the interests of others he was all through, and

present in spirit with his flock, may be seen from these words, addressed to them, on the cover of the Magazine, and dating only a fortnight before the end.

"EDINBURGH, *October* 1*st*, 1890.

"DEAR FRIENDS,—As the Colleague-Pastorate of the Congregation is still vacant, I take upon myself to welcome you home from holiday recreation. Though still unable, from protracted illness, to take any immediate share in Congregational life and action, my heart yearns over you with ministerial affection and regard; and most earnestly do I pray that the Lord may send you ere long a pastor after His own heart, who may feed you with knowledge and understanding, and guide you wisely in the way of peace.

"May I venture to plead that brotherly love may rule your fellowship in present circumstances. Let no one claim pre-eminence, whether in counsel or in work, over his brethren. Let all be clothed with humility. Yea, let all of you be subject one to another, and in such a case the choice of a minister will be carried out in a harmonious manner to the Congregational comfort and the honour of the Lord. Let much prayer be also earnestly offered in this connection, and a happy issue will be all the surer. Yours affectionately in Christ,—EDWARD A. THOMSON."

At this date there came a relapse in aggravated form of the trouble with which he had now struggled nearly two years. During many previous weary days and nights of suffering he had continued submissive

and cheerful, fresh spasms of pain only drawing from him the remark, "Surely I must be a very rough stone since I require so much polishing." The last fourteen days were often clouded with the wanderings of fever; yet even then his spiritual faculty was at work. He had read to him the seven penitential Psalms; the last read at his own request was Psalm vi., to every verse of which he appended his Amen. Among the last words he was overheard repeating were: "Water from the smitten rock," "The Life that is to come," "I am a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all." His bright spirit passed into the unclouded light of his Lord on the 14th October 1890, in the seventy-fourth year of his age and the forty-fourth of his ministry.

To those personally unacquainted with him it would not be easy to convey a conception of that strongly-marked individuality which so endeared him to his flock and to his friends. One of the earliest of these says—"He had the genuine Scottish fun in his very nature, but deeper and more pervasive than all other qualities was the religious element, which sanctified the whole man, and never appeared to me to be obscured." From the pulpit of St Stephen's, after his funeral, another—now the last survivor of those Seceders who joined the Free Church in 1852—said—"Need I remind you of his warm, impulsive, and loving heart, of his genuineness, guilelessness, simplicity of nature, pre-eminently in Scottish phrase 'ae fauld.'

Some men are said to 'carry their heart upon their sleeve,' and we must speak of our friend as having his faults, for that is commonplace about every man. But the most prominent failing in him was that he did not hide his faults. That emotional, impulsive temperament led him sometimes to say hot and hasty things. The public could see these, but not the wise judgment, as well as kind heart that lay behind. In sudden speech he might seem explosive and erratic, but in consultation and in living he was balanced. What made and kept him so was the wisdom of the only wise God. On one of the first occasions on which I met him, the conversation turned upon the Bible, and among other things he said, 'I know the Bible is Divine, for it so suits me as a sinner.' From that moment I knew the man, and where to find him. The fear of God was the ballast of his life. As a friend he was true, trusty, and enduring. The intimacy of years tests the man, and he has stood the test with me. In all our intercourse, I never knew him unkind, ungenerous, or untrue. He was invariably affectionate. In days of heavy sorrow and bereavement, in times of suffering, in the even tenor of everyday life, he was always the same."

The grandson of the first Dr Thomas M'Crie appropriately closes a public tribute to our friend's memory with these words:—"The lovingness and the loveworthiness of the man found recognition in another way. There have been men so genial, so winsome, so

brotherly, as to be known and spoken of among their brethren by both Christian name and surname. Such a man was the late Professor Burns of Glasgow, the 'Islay Burns' of his wide circle; and such an one was the subject of this notice. To others he might be Mr Thomson, or the Rev. E. A. Thomson; but among us who knew and loved him he was always spoken of as 'Edward Thomson.' Dear Edward Thomson! What he once said of another I apply to him—'Farewell, my friend. No! Farewell is not the word. We never see a Christian's face for the last time. *Au revoir.* We shall meet again.'" *

* Rev. G. C. M'Crie, Ayr, in *F.C. Monthly.*

I.

ESS OF SALVATION.

Address).

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nearer than when we believed."

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SERMON I.

THE APPROACHING NEARNESS OF SALVATION.

(A New Year's Address).

"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." —ROMANS xiii. 11.

"THE Lord is risen!" On the morning of the Lord's day, the early Christians were wont to address one another in these words by way of fraternal greeting; and the greeting was both expressive and appropriate. It was as good as saying, "All is well,—well with Him, and therefore well with us. He has paid our debt and obtained a full discharge. He has expiated our guilt and brought in an everlasting righteousness. He has made atonement for our sins, and Divine anger is turned away. God is reconciled in Christ, and by grace we are saved."

And why should there be less of Christian faith and hope in our salutations now? "Peace with you" was the Master's salutation to His disciples on the first of Christian Sabbaths; and with His example it is not amiss to say that there ought to be much more of a devout spirit in even the ordinary civilities of life, in so very simple a matter as even the expression of our

kindly wishes for one another. Alluding to the Scripture-story of the ancient harvest-field, when the farmer hailed his reapers in words of prayerful well-wishing, and they responded in like spirit and manner to his pious courtesy, it has been said that, considering the day, the place, and the purpose, of the assembly, it were a beautiful and appropriate thing when ministers and people meet in the house of God, to meet after the manner of Boaz and his people, the minister on entering the pulpit, saying, "The LORD be with you," and the people responding, "The Lord bless thee." I cannot say that I desire to see any practice of the kind prescribed in the rubric of our common order; for, like all merely liturgic ceremonial, it might soon degenerate into the mummery of a cold and heartless formalism; but, surely, as Christians, we have good reason to interchange salutations, and I may, therefore, be permitted to address the words of the text as a congratulation of heavenly hope to my brethren in Christ Jesus, along with an assurance of my most earnest prayers for their Christian welfare; "For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

The quickening influence of such a congratulation may be advantageously brought to bear upon you, as setting out to-day on, as it were, a new stage in life's progress; and with this view, let me invite you to consider with attentive practical application, the nature of salvation and the blessed hope of its approaching nearness, as these two topics are presented in the text.

I. The Nature of Salvation.

The word "Salvation" is variously employed in Scripture. Whenever one believes in Jesus Christ he becomes, according to the gospel, a participant of His salvation; the sentence of justification is passed upon him; the process of sanctification is begun in him; his title to heaven is secure, and, as soon as his meetness for it is complete, he will not be out of it for a day. But the "salvation" of the text looks beyond the present privileges and attainments of believers in union to Christ, and participation upon earth of new covenant blessings. It denotes their glorification or communion with Christ in the blessedness of the heavenly state, their actual and full enjoyment of eternal glory.

Now we must not go away with an explanation of the word, as all that is necessary to set before us the nature of this salvation. Let us consider the explanation. Let us try to take up its meaning.

What is salvation in the sense of glorification? What is communion with Christ in the eternal blessedness of heaven?

The question is easily asked, but it is not so easily answered. It asks more than the wisest and holiest among men can tell. It is impossible for the most enlarged capacity on earth to conceive in an adequate degree, as it is alike impossible for the most exuberant language on earth to express in any corresponding

degree what salvation is. Even an angel's description would fall short of the reality, and in truth an adequate description would be useless to us; like the full blaze of sunlight on an infant's eyes, it would blind us altogether; its very brightness would plunge us into total darkness. And so it must remain beyond human thought and human speech, till it is matter, not of believing hope, but of actual enjoyment.

> "'Tis misty all, both sight and sound—
> I only know 'tis fair and sweet—
> 'Tis wandering on enchanted ground
> With dizzy brow and tottering feet.
> But patience! there may come a time
> When these dull ears shall scan aright
> Strains, that outring Earth's drowsy chime
> As Heaven outshines the taper's light."*

After all, there are some brief hints in the word of God, some faint views or glimpses, by means of which we may obtain a not inaccurate, although it be an inadequate, conception of salvation; and, instructed by them, this much at least we are warranted to say, that, in its ultimate reference, or in the sense of glorification, it includes a state of complete holiness and consummate happiness in the immediate and uninterrupted vision and fruition of our God in Christ for ever.

Let us take note of the component elements of salvation in its completeness as discovered by these hints.

1. *It is a state of complete holiness.* For all the sin of the earthly state, so sadly defiling and depraving as

* *Keble's* "Christian Year." Fourth Sunday in Advent.

it always is, will then be done away with entirely and for ever. There will be no deceitful heart, no degrading appetite, no unhallowed feeling, no accusing conscience, not the slightest vestige or even taint of evil, in one of the countless millions before the Throne. Whatever may have been their character among men, once perhaps bemired and blackened by the pollutions of the world, in heaven they will be pure as Christ is pure, and perfect even as their Father there is perfect; all of them holy, and unblameable, and unreprovable, in His sight; not an imperfect saint among them; not an angel, even the most exalted, more immaculate in his sanctity; every one holy and without blemish, without spot or wrinkle; altogether faultless in the adornment, the peerless beauty, of the full-orbed and full-summed excellencies which form the moral character of God Himself. And this is salvation. It is a state of complete holiness.

2. *It is also a state of consummate happiness.* And how shall this be ever described, or so much as indicated? No wearisome nights or toilsome days, no apprehension of evil, or bill of mortality, or agony of separation, to vex any saint in heaven. Aching heads, bleeding hearts, farewells, and adieus, unknown; all the crosses, trials, distresses, afflictions, bereavements, gone for ever. What a joy the very thought of it! "There shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." And this is salvation. *It is a state of* consummate happiness.

3. And *this complete holiness and consummate happiness shall be enjoyed in the immediate and uninterrupted vision and fruition of the Three-One God in Christ for ever.* "O, bliss beyond compare," when all the clouds which are now spread over the face of the Throne shall be dispelled, and God in Christ most gladly seen and gratefully enjoyed in all His glory, without any cloud, without any distance, without any interruption, without any separation, world without end. This characteristic of salvation is unquestionably beyond description. We know nothing of it. We call it "the beatific vision," because we are assured it will be attended with the highest ecstasy. "Thou shalt make me glad with the light of Thy countenance." "When I awake, I shall be satisfied with Thy likeness." But more than this we cannot say about it. We have no notion, and we can form no conception, of the satisfaction, the gladness, the exceeding joyfulness which must enrapture the saints in the presence of divine glory. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." "And so shall we ever be with the Lord." And this is salvation. Ever with the Lord,—complete holiness and consummate happiness in the beatific vision, the ineffable fruition of "glory, and honour, and immortality," eternal life with Christ in God. It is all that. It is much more than that. The half of it, the millionth part of it, has not been told; it never *can* be told.

After all, the nature of salvation is one thing, and the hope of salvation is another. The apostle here speaks of it as "our salvation." And to have this expectant assurance of its bliss, how blessed the attainment. The ardent longings of him who cries with the spouse in the song, "Make haste, my Beloved, and be Thou like to a roe, or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices;" or with our Scottish sainted Rutherford, "When shall the vicissitudes of day and night, seedtime and harvest, winter and summer, terminate for ever, that I may have salvation in the full fruition of it? Why tarry the wheels of the Redeemer's chariot?" are not wonderful in this regard. Let us enjoy the same assurance in the exercise of Christian faith and hope; and these longings, although rare, very rare, will become less and less rare to us: even death will lose its terrors; and, on even the impending advent of the eternal state, this will be an animating, an exciting, a thrice blessed thought to us,—"For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

Now let us turn to consider, and also try to realize, this blessed hope.

II. The Approaching Nearness of Salvation.

The happy assurance to this effect is not common among men. There are but few who care about it. There are but few who think about it. And there are fewer still, far fewer, who possess it.

1. *It is an assurance which belongs to believers only.* Evidently it is such as have the spirit of faith who speak of it in the text as their attainment. They believe, and therefore speak. Others have no right to it, no enjoyment of it; it is utterly unknown to them. We discern accordingly between the believer and the unbeliever, between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. To the one we say,—It is yours to enjoy this blessed assurance, as the full assurance of understanding, the full assurance of faith, and the full assurance of hope. To the other we can only say,—"Alas, my brother."

2. *Yet it is an assurance which is enjoyed by conscious believers only.*—I repeat that it belongs of right to all believers. There is not one of them who should not possess it as his own. But many do not see that it is theirs. They are in doubt about themselves. They do not know, or at least they are not sure, that they have believed. They are very much afraid that they have not. Or they have fallen from the high attainment by sinful compliances, by an untender, unfruitful, world-conforming conversation, and you may hear them moaning out the plaint of desperate sorrow,

> "Where is the blessedness I knew
> When first I saw the Lord?"

Or again,—

> "Thy former loving kindnesses,
> O Lord, where be they now?"

What shall we say to such Zion-mourners? To address them with the comfortable assurance of the text would appear to them but idle mockery, would only embitter their grief, and make them weep still more. Shall we sit down and weep along with them? Nay; let us rather try to cheer them, to open up to them in Christ the source and the means of an endless consolation. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Salvation is not far off from them. Like the fountain of water, which was so nigh to Hagar in the desert, although she did not know it, it is quite at hand. They need but an angel's hand to point it out and an open eye to see it. Let them make this their prayer,—"Lord, that I may receive my sight," and the gracious answer will not be wanting, it will most certainly be given; and then the assurance will be so happily enjoyed, not now and then, but always—every Sabbath, every day.

3. *At the same time it is very important to prevail on believers to realize this assurance when they are in a languid frame, and even when they are in a lethargic state.* To prove that believers may become languid and fall asleep is quite unnecessary. It was to a prophet that the stirring cry was addressed in an hour of imminent jeopardy, "What meanest thou, O sleeper?" It was to an apostle that the expostulatory reproof was uttered in a time of great concern, "Simon, sleepest thou? Couldest not thou watch one hour?" Luther, in one of his discourses, suggests the quaint idea of a

high anniversary gathering in pandemonium, where evil spirits are called upon to give an account of the way in which they have been discharging their mission on earth; and thus he describes a few of the reports given in on such an occasion to the Prince of Darkness. One said that he had let loose the wild beasts of the desert upon a travelling caravan of Christians, and that he had left their bones bleaching on the sand. "And what of that?" said Satan, "their souls were saved." Another said that he had overtaken and overwhelmed a ship-galley in a hurricane of the east wind, and that he had seen its crew and passengers, all of whom were Christians, drowned in the Great sea. And again said Satan, "What of that? their souls are saved." Then a third stood up and gave in this report. I have been trying for ten long years to lull a disciple of Christ asleep, hard work it was; but I succeeded at the last, and, when I came away to attend this meeting, I left him sleeping. "And upon that the devil laughed," says Luther, "and all the night stars of hell shouted for joy." And no wonder. A Christian sleeping! Rocked asleep by the Wicked one! Yes, if anything could make hell laugh, and heaven weep, this would. And yet how readily we yield to sleep, and how little, how very little, we think of it as sinful. Legh Richmond, the amiable author of the "Dairyman's Daughter," called out with deep concern on his death-bed, "We are but half-awake, we are but half-awake." I am sure that even the most active and

exercised in godliness among us will make the same acknowledgment. Perhaps some may be ready to say, "We are hardly awake, we are not awake at all."

Truly we all need to be stirred, roused, wakened up. And how shall this be done? Simple exhortations to awake from sleep will never do it. Exhortations are useful enough in their own way, yet of themselves entirely ineffectual. Like sleepers in church who murmur out an angry growl when a friendly blow is given them, and then hang down their heads again, we are but disturbed by exhortations and nothing more. There must be inducements as well as exhortations; reasons, motives, encouragements, as well as commands and counsels. You see that gallant ship in full sail,—how it is bounding on its course to the emigrant's distant home. The voyage has been long, and the passengers are weary. Everything hangs listlessly about them. They sleep away their time as best they can. At length there is a stir. The most languid has become active. Every one is busy. What has made the change? They are within a day's sail, or little more, of their destination, and they are in high expectancy. Now sleep lies lightly on their eyes at night, and when at daybreak "Land" is sung out by the morning watch, you see them hastening from their cabins to the foreship, and looking out with straining eyes on the enlarging outlines and peculiar features of the country of their adoption. Who has not felt something of the same kind on returning by

coach or rail after an absence of some time from home? Exhausted by the length of the ride, the closeness of the carriage, and, if by rail, the deafening noise of the engine and the train in their labouring flight, you have been glad to sleep. But the journey is drawing to a close, and your sleep is over. Well-known objects begin to come in sight; the hill behind the town, the fields around with the farm-buildings and their cheerful steadings, the suburbs with their tree-embosomed villas and crystal vineries, the rows of streets in long succession, the tall chimneys, the church spires, the cathedral dome, there the house of such a friend, and there the house of such another, and there at last your own loved home itself: and where is now the sense of weariness,—the wish to sleep?

Now it is thus that we would seek to rouse you from the lethargy which may now and again, and even often, overtake and overcome you in the prosecution of a Christian course. When at any time your soul is much discouraged because of the way, because of its perplexities and its perils, and you would fain look back, we would tell you of the happy end of it; or when the world, with its fascinating allurements, would entice you away from grace and duty, and, like Delilah with Samson, doze you to sleep on the knees of its guilty pleasures, we would waken you up by telling you to listen to the ringing bells of the temple above the skies; like Columbus, when he

encouraged his disheartened and mutinous crew to prosecute the Atlantic voyage by pointing out to them the tree-branches and the land-birds which at length began to gather round the ship in evidence of their approximation to the new world of which they were in search, we would set before you the prognostics and the pledges of redemption drawing nigh, and then shout in Rutherford's dying words, "Glory, glory, glory, dwelleth in Immanuel's land."

> "The distant landscape draws not nigh
> For all our gazing, but the soul,
> That upward looks, may still descry,
> Nearer each day, the brightening goal."

I am well aware that there are some who take exception to ministry of such a kind. They would neither animate our hopes nor excite our fears. Religion with them is symbolized by a man bearing fire in the one hand to burn up heaven and water in the other to put out hell; and you must serve God accordingly in view of neither; you must not think or try to escape the one and enjoy the other, else you are legal, mercenary, selfish, without love to God, the only animating principle, as they say, of a Gospel life and conversation.

Brethren, I believe this doctrine of theirs to be wholly Sadducean in both its nature and tendency. Take away the hope of Canaan, and the congregation of Israel in the wilderness will make themselves a captain instead of Moses, and return to Egypt. Better

the flesh-pots and bread to the full, although in the house of bondage, than but the name of freedom in the desert, with nothing brighter or happier in prospect. Nor is this the view only of Israel under the Old Testament, of Israel after the flesh. It is the view of Israel under the New Testament, of Israel after the Spirit. "If in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." "If, after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" Better the Epicurean doctrine with all its sensualism,—"Let us eat and drink: for to-morrow we die." So unscriptural it is, so antiscriptural, to shut out the influence of a heavenly hope from the energies and activities of a Christian life.

"By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." "Through faith, others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection:" and others "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance." And "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession," "the Captain of our salvation," Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith,

who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Thus then the Apostle stirs up the slothful, awakens those that are asleep. He accompanies his exhortations with quickening promises, animating motives, holy, hopeful, high encouragements, as in that text, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light:" and as in this, our New Year's congratulation,—"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

It is related of two ministers, who happened to meet in riding along the same road, that one of them, after they had had some easy familiar Christian conversation, observed in a pleasant way as he looked into the other's face, "I think, sir, you are on the wrong side of fifty." "On the wrong side of fifty!" was the reply, "No, indeed, I am on the right side of fifty." "Surely," rejoined the first speaker, "you are turned of fifty." "Turned of fifty!" again replied the second, "O yes, I am, but still I am on the right side of fifty; for I am nearer my crown of glory."

"This sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er,
I'm nearer home to-day
Than I ever have been before.
Nearer my Father's house
Where the 'many mansions' be,

Nearer the great white Throne,
Nearer the crystal sea,
Nearer the bound of life,
Where we lay our burdens down,
Nearer leaving the cross,
Nearer winning the crown!"

Now this is the Christian idea of the matter. It is the idea of the text.

And what a stimulus it is in the way of duty. We are all so apt to grow weary in the way of duty. And yet why should we? Is it not worth while to reach the goal? Is it not worth while to win the prize? And when it is so very near, only a few paces further, ought we not to be on and at it? "The night is far spent," the night of life; why sleep ye? Let the beasts of the forest which creep abroad at nightfall return at daydawn to their dens; but man should then go forth to his work and to his labour; you should be up and doing. "The day is at hand," the day of glory. And I ask you, is not this stimulating?

And what a comfort too it is in the time of trial. How bitter trial is, who does not know? Wait a little; and, for the cross, there is the crown. We are passing through the wilderness to Canaan. We are going through tribulation to the kingdom. Our light affliction is but for a moment. Our very heaviest sufferings are only for a while. A few more pangs, a few more tears, a few more days of heaviness, and nights

of sorrow; they are fast diminishing; in a twinkling they will be over; and then:—

> "O joyful hour; O blest abode;
> I shall be near, and like my God!"

"Weeping endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." And I ask you, is not this comforting?

And what an encouragement it is, as well, in the prospect of death. For then indeed salvation is not far off. In the memoir of William Jay, there is mention made of an old man who, when dying, requested that the ninety-first psalm should be read to him, and then said, "The whole of that psalm has been fulfilled in my experience except the last clause of the last verse; and this too, I am persuaded, will be fulfilled to me within an hour." "With long life will I satisfy him!" This clause of the verse had been already fulfilled to him; for he died at the advanced age of ninety-two. "And I will show him my salvation!" There it is. "My salvation," within an hour. Think of it, my friends. What, though death may wear an angry look when Christ sends him for us, shall we not welcome him as a friend rather than as a foe, if he is sent to open heaven's door to admit us to its glory? Let us look over and beyond that skull-head and those cross-bones. There is Christ and all salvation in and with Him to eternal ages. The sight has often made the dying martyr feel in the midst of the flames as in a bed of roses; and it can make your death-bed a very hopeful and

even triumphant one. And I ask you, is not this encouraging?

And now, my friends, as the Galilean fishermen said of Jesus when He arose and stilled the tempest with a word, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the seas obey Him?" I would say of you in sight of this salvation, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" Can you be covetous, envious, worldly, carnal, sensual, devilish! A bat-owl at night, and a singing lark in the morning, a soaring eagle in the day? Impossible.

It is said of good King Jehoshaphat that "his heart was lifted up in the ways of God." The low state of religion among Christians is just because their hearts are not so lifted up. Such, as respected himself, was the dying confession of Dr Mason Good; and many, I am sure, will most readily join in the confession, "I have taken what unfortunately the generality of Christians too much take. I have taken the middle walk of Christianity. I have endeavoured to live up to its duties and doctrines; but I have lived below its privileges."

Let us live up, brethren, to the privileges of our most holy faith. Keep salvation in your eye, the King in His beauty, and the land that is not now far off; and I promise that you will not be readily cast down or left behind in the ways of God. To complain of manifold remaining imperfections you may indeed have much occasion; but again, cleansing yourselves in the

faith of the promises from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God, you will grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; you will go on and on in the well-doing of a living Christianity; you will rise, and rise, and rise, in the all-pervading spirituality of a thorough Scriptural religion; and, as with "excelsior" cry, you mount one knoll after another on the hill of God, and see the vale of tears passing away from beneath your view, this will be such a relief at every stage to your panting, aspiring spirit.

"Here, in the body pent,
Absent from Him I roam;
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
A day's march nearer home!"

Ere I close this discourse, let me address a concluding word to those who are yet without an interest in this salvation. The lapse of time, dear friends, ought to be a very serious matter with you. Possibly you may not think it so. You may put the evil day far off; and, like the Persian king, decree that none enter your court clothed with sackcloth; you may join with godless mirth in the New Year's wassail, and idly talk of "many returns" for yourselves and others in the interchange of the season's compliments and good wishes. But as time goes on, and you are carried away as with a flood, let me beg of you to pause a moment, and to consider,—"Whither thus away? Whither so fast going"? Nearer and nearer,

it is certain, to death. But what, if it be also nearer and nearer to perdition? Is it not heart-breaking to think of it, fearfully alarming and confounding? What although all earth's pleasures were your own, earth's riches, earth's honours, earth's crowns and kingdoms; what, although you had a century's lease of them—a millennium's lease of them—if judgment lingered not, if damnation slumbered not behind them? With all its quaintness, *that* was a pungent speech of Knox's to the court ladies who were disposed to make sport of him when, in answer to the royal summons, he waited upon the queen at Holyrood;—"O fair ladies, how pleasing were this life of yours, if it should always abide, and then in the end that we might pass into heaven with all this gay gear. But fye! upon that knave Death, that will come whether we will or no." Yes, brethren, and come—when? They say that there is but an inch plank between the seaman and eternity. "As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death!" This night thy soul may be required of thee,—and what if like Dives you should be driven from earth's comforts to hell's torments, if like Capernaum, with its highly exalted religious privilege, you should be cast down from heaven to hell.

Let me beseech you by the love of Christ to flee from the wrath to come. To flee! Perhaps you say, —"Whither?" In reply I just tell you the old story. Blessed be God, it is not out of date, though old; it

is ever new, however old; it is, in truth, a story which can never die of its old age. Flee to Jesus, the living, the loving Jesus, the Friend of sinners, the Saviour of the world. Or, to use the Bible's own simple words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Yes, let any sinner now believe; let every sinner now believe; and be he young or old, be he rich or poor, he shall be saved; and whereas, in days gone by, he may have been afraid of the three last things, death, judgment, eternity, he may now dismiss his fears, for, as he lies down night after night, and rises up morning after morning, he may rejoice in the ever heart-inspiring, ever life-awakening assurance of the text,—"For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Amen.

SERMON II.

THE CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE.

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."—ROMANS viii. 33, 34.

THE magnificent utterance of this text may be advantageously considered under two heads,—the Challenge Offered and the Challenge Answered. The latter is that which forms the marrow of the text, but our estimate of its value must largely turn on our appreciation of the former. The Lord by His own good Spirit accompany our consideration of both the one and the other with a plenary blessing.

I. THE CHALLENGE OFFERED.

It is put in the most emphatic form. It is also put in the most emphatic terms. It is so put decisively, conclusively.

1. *It is a challenge to every creature.*—"Who?" Where is he that will dare to do it? The apostle looks round the universe, he does not confine himself to the world, he does not confine himself to time, he

projects himself into eternity with all its spiritual intelligences, powers, realities; he faces "life, death, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, any other creature," every other creature, and, dauntless, like a hero-champion in full armour who offers himself for combat to any one who will enter the lists with him, he throws down the gauntlet, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?" Every mouth is stopped.

2. *It is a challenge upon every thing.*—What, or where, is that upon which a charge—any charge—can be advanced? The apostle looks over the entire history of life from first to last; he does not confine himself to the consideration of a particular portion of it; he does not confine himself to the consideration of a particular aspect of it; he views it in the light of the law with its changeless sanctions, in the light of eternity with its retributive decisions; he arraigns it before God in the perfection of His nature and government, in the very perfection of His entire judicial administration, and, as dauntless as ever, he comes forth like the old champion with this sweeping, absolute, universal challenge, "Who shall lay any thing" — "any thing" — "to the charge of God's elect?" Are there not thousands of things which may be made matter of charge against them? May not every thing in their life-history from the day of their birth be made matter of charge against them? Yes, Every thing. No, Nothing.

3. *It is a charge respecting relevant accusation.*—Irrelevant charges will not do. In a court of justice an indictment, made up of no matter how many counts, is thrown out at once if it is not shown to hold in law. Accusations go for nothing when law makes no provision to take them up. And here again the apostle proclaims the absolute inadmissibility of any charge in law against the elect of God at the Divine tribunal. They may have sins enough with which they may charge themselves, with which they may charge one another, or with which others, as the accuser of the brethren together with the world which knoweth them not, may charge them; but then these charges, although they may be preferred against them in the court of conscience or in the courts of human judicature, cannot be brought against them in that court, the court of the Divine justiciary, by which alone sin as sin can be judged. They have not a tittle of law to back them. The bench rises whenever they are stated. It will not look at them. It tears up the indictment. It throws it out of court. There is no case. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge"—"to the charge"—"of God's elect?"

4. *It is a challenge respecting righteous condemnation.*—There is no charge. There is no case. But suppose there were. There are certainly materials to form a charge, to make a case. Suppose the charge drawn up, the indictment framed, the case tried. How would it go? Would it be adverse? Could it be adverse?

Suppose it were. Suppose the finding of the court to be, "Proven!" "Guilty!" What then? The plea in arrest of judgment would sist procedure, would secure acquittal. Paul is brought to the whipping-post and bound with thongs. The lictors are standing by, and the executioner with scourge in hand is ready for the signal. One word to the centurion prevents the execution, and the chief captain orders his prisoner to be at once unbound. "Is it lawful to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?" So here. Is it lawful to condemn a man that is in Christ? It is not lawful. The Judge will not condemn. Condemnation is impossible. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Not one condemnation!" Such is the literal rendering of the word. Not so much as a single charge on which any sentence of condemnation can be passed. "Who is He that condemneth"—"that condemneth?"

"God's elect!" Yes, it will be readily granted that they will never be condemned. But then, say some, What is that to us? Were we of God's elect, then would we ring out the challenge; and ring it out with such a will. But we have no assurance to this effect. We are in doubt. We walk in darkness and have no light. We know not, neither do we understand, how we can come to know that we are of the number of God's elect. Brethren, your perplexity does not appear unreasonable. It is a perplexity by which many have been sorely troubled. As Hart says in his rhyming way—

"Though God's election is a truth,
Small comfort there I see,
Till I am told by God's own mouth,
That He has chosen me!"

Let me try to meet this perplexity of yours. O, that I could relieve it. O, that by the blessing of the Divine Spirit I might even remove it.

First, I would say—God's elect are not the self-elect. For look at these two men, at the Pharisee with his "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, or even as this publican," and then at the publican with his "God be merciful to me a sinner." The LORD seeth not as man seeth. The Pharisee, self-elect, is Divinely reprobate. The publican, self-reprobate, is Divinely elect. Or, look here at the prodigal. What self-accusation. What self-condemnation,—"Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son." And where is the paternal condemnation? There is really nothing of the kind. How the old man falls on his son's neck, and kisses him, and then cries so commandingly to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Behold a type, a representative, of the elect of God!

Then again I would say—God's elect have also elected Him. His choice of them always issues in

their choice of Him. Hence there comes in here a question. You ask whether God has chosen you. I ask whether you have chosen God. Your self-accusation! Your self-condemnation! Give way to it without reserve. Let there be no extenuation or excuse. Yet let me put a finger upon your pulse; let me sound the beating of your heart. Is there no Godward throbbing there—no outbreathing of desire—"O that He were mine, and that I were His?" That desire was not self-originated. It is God-originated. It was grace, not nature, that inspired it. "We love Him." How? Why? "Because He first loved us." He is always first. Your desire for Him, your choice of Him, is but responsive to His desire for you, His choice of you. Let not the thought of the Divine election trouble you. God in Christ is on your side. Get up to this high tower, and from its summit ring out the challenge without doubt or dread—"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?"

II. The Challenge Answered.

The answer is most manful. No faltering spirit. No hesitating tone. Its intrepidity is perfect. Nor any wonder. It is fulminated from a position which is better than impregnable, which is absolutely unassailable. How can the justified in Christ be convicted, or how can they be condemned?

1. *Consider the Author of their justification.* The val
ity of justification, as a judicial act, depends in the fi
instance on him by whom it is pronounced. Let
person be arraigned before a court of justice, it matt
not how many witnesses may come forward to att
his innocence. They can only record their evide
in his favour. Their function terminates with th
The Judge can alone pronounce the sentence of
quittal. Then the panel is dismissed, unless there
a Court of Error or of Review to which the case m
be appealed. Yet there again a judge decides; a
should his decision confirm the sentence of the infe
court, the case takes end, the panel is at once set f
as a righteous person, and who can accuse or conde
him then? Turn to the case in hand. "It is G
that justifieth." "It is GOD." The emphasis rests
that. The justification in question is not personal,
human, or even angelic. It is Divine. It is the jus
fication of God as Judge. It is therefore valid. T
prerogative of judgment belongs to Him—to H
alone. His act of justification is indubitably judici
It is no less unchallengeable. It can never be sho
to have proceeded on erroneous or insufficient groun
It is impossible that it could. "Shall not the Juc
of all the earth do right?" It is also final. Th
is no Court of Error or of Review to which it can e
be appealed. "None else is Judge but God." A
hence the old defiance of the Messiah-Mediator in
prophetical contemplation of His sacrificial righteo

ness: "Behold the LORD God will help Me; who is he that shall condemn Me?" It is the echo of that same defiance that we have here; and it is every way as unfalteringly and irrefragably decisive. Let all heaven and earth and hell combine together to annul it, they must first annul the Throne of the Eternal. The condemnation of His judgment can only follow the condemnation of Himself. Ring out the challenge, loud, clear, triumphant. It will never, never, be met. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth? IT IS GOD THAT JUSTIFIETH."

2. *Consider the grounds of their justification.* Justification is not an act of sovereignty. It is an act of justice. It would never do for the judge to dispose of the case according to his pleasure. That would be to stultify his function. The law must rule. The judgment must be formed according to the statute. And hence it is not enough to say, "It is God that justifieth." In one sense it is enough, every way enough. We can trust God. "As for God, His way is perfect." We know that He would as soon deny Himself as do anything contrary to law, to justice. Were we ignorant of His grounds of judgment, we would nevertheless receive His judgment without suspicion. But in the present instant the grounds are patent. They are distinctly known. They are fully known. And they every way as distinctly and as fully support His judgment. Here they are, four of them in all. They have

been compared to the ropes which are used in mini operations. Every strand of these ropes is warrant to bear the weight of the entire tonnage which in th corded combination they are ever required to be That they will stand the utmost strain which may put on them in use is thus absolutely sure. In li manner each of the grounds on which justification God is said to rest is all-sufficient to sustain it. Wh should be said of them when viewed in their ent and perfect combination?

1. *There is the expiation of Christ.* That He di is certain. Respecting the fact of Calvary there is dispute. Infidelity has no foothold to assail it. H how came He to die? Death is the penalty of tra gression. He must have been made under the law, which it is the penalty. Was He a transgressor of A thousand times, No. But then again, How came to die? Tell me not the history of the cross. I kn it well. Unfold to me its mystery. "It is Christ th died?" "It is Christ"—the Sent of God, to be t Saviour of the world, the divinely commissioned a appointed Surety of sinners. "It is Christ that die —"the just for the unjust"—to make atonement their sins. There it is; His death was vicarious— their stead; penal—the punishment of their sin expiatory—magnifying the Divine law, satisfying t Divine justice on their behalf; their condemnation w fully borne in it; it left nothing for them to bear; point of law it was as much their condemnation as

was His; and hence no legal claim remains to be made upon them and no judicial condemnation to be passed upon them; their absolution, justification, acquittal, is, in short, a matter of common equity, of necessary justice. The payment of a debt cannot be paid twice over. The first settlement of the claim is its final settlement. It is the same with the infliction of a judicial penalty. Law never requires it to be twice inflicted. Once justice is satisfied by its infliction, it is for ever satisfied.

Tell me, what sins you have committed, where they were committed, how they were committed, in what peculiar circumstances, with what peculiar aggravations. That you should have sinned,—sinned so frequently, so presumptuously, with so much deliberation, it would seem to be impossible for you ever to answer for yourself. An adequate atonement, a perfect satisfaction, can you furnish *that?* Who can furnish *that?* Behold the cross of Christ. Though inculpated by every variety and even every enormity of transgression, you may there find a decisive answer to all condemning charges which may be brought against you. Under the shadow of that cross you may claim the absolution of a Divine acquittal. There is an infinite satisfaction in the atonement-sacrifice of Christ. Like the waters of the flood, its expiation covers "all the high hills" of human demerit "that are under the whole heaven." Unspeakably more than ever so many "cubits" above "the mountains," "upward," "upward," to the throne of

God, does it prevail. Condemnation is entirely swallowed up of it. For the sins of the entire world, of the entire universe, are not equal in point of guilt, and will never be, to the expiation of the great atonement in point of merit. Now then let the challenge be rung out the wide world over; let the reverberation of its echo sound as far up as to the very judgment seat itself; no condemning charge or sentence will ever can ever, meet it. The Divine law forbids it. The Divine government forbids it. The whole truth, righteousness, holiness, perfection, character of God forbids it. The cogency of the argument with the point, the emphasis, of its conclusion is here invincible. "Who is He that condemneth? IT IS CHRIST THAT DIED."

2. *There is the resurrection of Christ.*—Regarded in its expiatory character, the death of Christ carried in it an all-satisfying virtue, a Divinely and therefore an infinitely satisfying virtue. All that the circumstances of the case required, all that law and justice demanded, was fully met in it. In this respect the argument of the text has quite enough to warrant it in the first strand of the rope by which it holds. "It is Christ that died." At the same time, this warrant might not have thus appeared to be all-decisive. If Christ had been detained among the dead, the thought might have not unnaturally arisen, Can it be that He has failed? Where is the evidence that the expiation of His atonement is Divinely satisfying? What if He be no better than the poor debtor, who, having failed to meet his

obligations, has been carried to prison and to judgment, and who will not be permitted to come out thence till he has paid the uttermost farthing of his debts? O, how His disciples mourned for Him when dead. "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." O, how His enemies would have triumphed had He remained among the dead. "Aha! Aha! So would we have it." Yes, Christ in the power of death is Christ in the debtor's jail! Who can say that He has paid the mighty debt! For aught we know justice is yet unsatisfied, the sentence of condemnation is yet on record; redemption may yet be as far off as ever. "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? For it is very great." Ah! the stone is rolled away. "He is not here; He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." "It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again."

"Yea rather!" The emphasis is on these two words. "Yea." "It is Christ that died." Behold the expiation of all your guilt, the atonement for all your sins. "Rather." "It is Christ that is risen again." Behold the discharge of all your legal obligations, the authoritative receipt of all your debts as paid by Him in full. "Yea rather." Behold the two together, His death and His resurrection always both together. For in the same character and for the same purpose that He died, in the same character and for the same purpose was He raised. You see

that cross. When He suffered, we suffered. When He died, we died. When His sacrifice was complete, it was complete for us. When all His work was finished, it was finished, all for us. "It is Christ that died." You see that sepulchre. When He rose from the dead, we rose. When He was taken from prison and from judgment, we were taken. When He passed out of the court of justice, no longer bound or fettered, every bond loosed, every fetter broken, legally discharged, fully discharged, we passed out too. "For He was delivered for our offences, and was raised for our justification." No condemnation under the broad shadow of His atonement-sacrifice. "Yea rather;" no condemnation under the broad shield of His resurrection-life. "It is Christ that is risen again."

Let the challenge be again rung out to all earth and all heaven together; not so much as even one condemning charge or condemning sentence will ever, can ever, stand before it. They must dare impossibilities and do impossibilities who would try to meet it. They must put the Prince of life to death again, and keep Him dead. They must bury Him again in the place of tombs, and keep Him buried. How can we but recognise the argument, and rejoice in its conclusion as here we have it? "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." "*Much more.*" "Who is he that

condemneth? It is Christ that died; YEA RATHER, THAT IS RISEN AGAIN."

3. *There is the exaltation of Christ.* It is plain to the discernment of faith that a full satisfaction has been rendered to law and justice in the atonement-sacrifice of Christ; and although faith could see no farther, *that* would be quite enough to sustain it in the assurance of non-condemnation. But it can see farther. And how much farther? The death or atonement-sacrifice of Christ is, as it were, the lowest step of the ladder by which faith climbs to heaven. The resurrection of Christ is a higher step. Oh how joyously faith mounts by means of it upon its way. Beholding the Surety in His exit from the prison-house of the grave, it gives forth that shout of triumph, "Yea rather, it is Christ that is risen again." "The answer of a good conscience toward God is by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

But the ladder has a yet higher step. Above the "Yea rather," there is an "Even," and such an "Even!" It is omitted in the revised version; but there is good manuscript authority for its retention, and it deserves to be retained. "What, and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascending up where He was before," "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion," "far above all heavens that he might fill all things!" There is no manner of "if" about it. "We see Jesus, who was made a while lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory

and honour." "The Government is upon His shoulder." "He is Governor among the nations." "He is King of kings, and Lord of lords." "All power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth." "Angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto Him.' "Who is even at the right hand of God." "Even!' Put the emphasis on even. Once He was low indeed Once He was in the grave even. Now He is high indeed. Now He is on the throne even, "even at the right hand of God." What an exaltation! And it is not on His own account. It is on ours. It is as "the Forerunner," that "He ascended up on high." It is "for us" that He hath "entered within the veil." It is on our account that He "is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." His own witness is decisive in this regard. "Father, the hour is come Glorify Thy Son that Thy Son also may glorify Thee as Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He may give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." "And the glory which thou gavest Me, I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one.

Sometimes we say, Can there be a stronger argument for non-condemnation than that which is taken from the expiation of Christ? And we are ready to conclude that there is not, and that there cannot be. But here we see that there is a stronger "Yea rather." Sometimes again we say,—But can there be a stronger argument for non-condemnation than that which is taken from the resurrection of Christ? And again

we are ready to conclude that there is not, and that there cannot be. But here we also see that there is yet a stronger. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son," "Sit Thou at My right hand." And what then? If Christ is thus at the right hand of God, in the very highest post of honour and of dignity in the heaven of heavens, for the purpose of righteous judgment, of universal judgment, shall He condemn those for whom He died? Shall He ever allow a hostile charge to be pressed against them when He has Himself on earth already answered every charge which can be pled in law against them? The thought is execrable. Let the very conception of it perish. His character forbids it. His perfection, His honour, His very happiness, forbid it. Then, if He does not condemn them, how can God condemn them? He must condemn His Son, He must condemn His Christ, He must condemn Himself, if He does that.

Let us go down to the gates. Let us stand forth, and again ring out the challenge, ring it out as with the thunder-boom of cannon in the battle, so that the wide universe may hear it. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again, WHO IS EVEN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD?

4. *There is the intercession of Christ.* "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum." It completes the argument. It crowns the climax. It

is the highest round of the ladder, the highest step of it. It is at the very top of the ladder. Let us not inquire at present into the manner of His intercession. We should not make much of it, although we did. It is enough that "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands which were the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." His very appearance in the presence of God for us has intercession in it. Some would have it that this is all the intercession that the Scripture speaks of. They say that His mere personal presence in heaven has quite efficacy enough in itself to secure our entrance and our presence there as well. And so unquestionably it has. Which of us can doubt it? At the same time it appears to me that His intercession is in some way positively real as well as efficacious. By one of the most eminent divines of the Puritan period it has been accentuated in this somewhat expressive form :—

Justice stood upon its rights. It would make no concession. The Surety paid down the debt in the debtor's jail to "the uttermost farthing." But Justice would not come down to take it. It would not stoop one whit. It would not move one step. Like the creditor who demands that the debt due to him should be paid upon the premises,—in his own office—in his own house, it demanded that the blood of sacrificial expiation should be brought up to heaven and poured out on the very judgment-seat itself. And Christ

came up to the full extent of the demand. Like the high priest of old who on the great atonement-day went in through outer veil and inner veil into the holiest of all to sprinkle the blood of the atonement-sacrifice upon the mercy-seat, He ascended up on high; He presented Himself in the heaven of heavens as the Lamb that had been slain; He carried all the merit, all the virtue, all the efficacy of His sacrifice along with Him; He placed it on the throne of God; He put it into the hand of God; I say not that He used words in doing so; I know nothing about that; but His whole heart spoke out; the whole desire, feeling, fervour, emotion, affection of His entire being expressed itself, perhaps in unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter; only I am persuaded that this was the purport of them, "Father, I will." How royal the intercession; there is authoritative efficacy in every word of it; it is not the intercession of one on his knees, but the intercession of one side by side with God on the very throne,—"Father, I WILL that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am." O, the high jubilee, the right royal and supreme Divine jubilee, that was then held in heaven. Kings on their birthdays give royal grants and largesses to their favourites. Herod "promised" to the daughter of Herodias "whatever she would ask." God has no birthday; but He ordained the ascension day to be kept as if it were the birthday, the anniversary birthday, of

His Eternal Son. "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree; the LORD hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me,"—there, on Thy throne, upon this Thy birthday, in kingly style, with kingly claim, "and I shall give Thee" whatsoever Thou shalt ask—the whole kingdom—"the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession."

Now then you may appreciate the argument in hand. It begins with "Yea." "It is Christ that died." This is the first step of the ladder; and how high it lifts you above the reach of condemnation. Then it goes on to "Rather"; "it is Christ that is risen again." This is the second step; and once you are upon it, you are out of the very sight of condemnation. Onwards it goes again to "Even;" "It is Christ who is even at the right hand of God." This is the third step; and on it you are out of the sight, and out of the sound, and out of the very thought of condemnation. Finally, it mounts to "Also"; "It is Christ who also maketh intercession for us." This is the last step. There is not a higher. There does not need to be a higher. Condemnation is the impossibility of impossibilities when we get upon it.

"Yea," "Rather," "Even," "Also." Put the emphasis upon Also, as after all, as last of all. Are you not faithless, but believing? Then, if condemned at all, you must be condemned by Christ who is even at the

right hand of God. God has there vested in Him as Lord and King the prerogative of judgment, and therefore of condemnation. Will He, your Advocate and Intercessor within the veil, condemn His own clients, for whom He died, and rose again, and ascended to even the right hand of God? Will He ignore, annul, His righteous advocacy, His meritorious intercession, by an adverse judgment, an unrighteous judgment? To do so would issue in the degradation of His office, the prostitution of His trust, the annihilation of His honour, the extinction of Himself. "Wherefore," as it is elsewhere put, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." "To save them to the uttermost! To the uttermost! Through all manner of difficulties! By all manner of means! In all manner of ways!" "To the uttermost!" Over, and over, and over! For ever, and ever, and ever! Condemnation is most assuredly here left infinitely behind, eternally behind. For who, or what can come after? "To the uttermost?" Once more, let us ring out the triumphant challenge, as if with the very thunder-peal of doom; in all the universe, and to all eternity, silence reigns in answer, or its own echo is the only answer; "It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

I have thus gone over these grounds of justification. Are they not sufficient? all-sufficient? each of them

all-sufficient? All of them together more than all-sufficient? The pillars of heaven are not more stable. The salvation to all eternity of the whole sacramental host is resting on them, and it rests as lightly as the sky on the mountain-top. Is your salvation resting on them? Ah! me, what will become of those who rest their faith, their hope, on any foundation but that which they combine to form? Here, on this foundation which God Himself hath laid in Zion; here let me rest, and always rest. "It is Christ that died!" I do not think enough of it, not by any means enough. For, if He died, I will not die; I cannot die. "Yea, rather, that is risen again!" I hardly ever think of it as I ought. For, if He is risen, I am risen. Because He lives, I shall live also, I must live also. "Who is even at the right hand of God!" When I think of it, I am ready to fall down as dead. How can I stand before Him? I forget that He has gone into heaven to prepare a place for me, that where He is there I may be also, with Him in His throne, even as He is with the Father in His throne. "Who also maketh intercession for us!" Let me really think of it. What may I not hope for, look for, from His intercession? One word of it will procure immortality, eternity, glory,—the immortality, the eternity, the glory, of all heaven,—for me. O Christ, I trust Thee; but not enough, not half enough. "Increase my faith." O Christ, I love Thee; but not enough, not half enough: O for grace to love Thee

more. O Christ, I worship Thee; but not enough; not half enough; let me fall down before Thee; let me cast my crown before Thy throne; let me lay myself down at Thy blessed feet. Thou art worthy, alone worthy, altogether worthy. O that my hand of faith had hold of Thee. O that my eye of faith saw none but Thee. O that my heart of faith were full of Thee. O Christ, O God in Christ. Let mine head be lifted up above mine enemies; and let my heart be lifted up above my fears; yes, and above my hopes; yes, and above my joys, my chiefest joys. Amen and Amen.

SERMON III.

THE VOICE AND THE ECHO.

"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face: my heart said unto thee, T face, Lord, will I seek."—PSALM xxvii. 8.

ONE would not give much for the appreciation of Ho Scripture which cannot tell how this and that porti of it have been made doubly precious, because of t experience of saving blessing in connection with it. question whether there is a saint of God who cann instance, if not the text by which he was convert at least some other text or texts by which his co version has been sustained and established. Ho much of the Word of God is, as it were, consecrat by stories of grace which are thus associated with Here is the text by which the Treasurer of Ethiop was brought to Jesus, "He was led as a sheep to t slaughter; and, like a lamb dumb before his sheare so opened He not His mouth; in His humiliation H judgment was taken away; and who shall declare H generation? for His life was taken from the earth And here is the text by which William Cowper w translated from darkness into light,—"Whom G hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in H blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission sins that are past." And here too is the text by whi

Augustine was emancipated from his lusts, when, on struggling with them in vain, he heard an unknown voice near by saying over and over again,—"Take up and read," "Take up and read"; and he ran and opened "the Book of St Paul's Epistles," and these were the words which first caught his eye,—"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." O, what an illuminated Bible we should have, if every verse in it which has been blessed for conversion or for comfort were to be printed in red letter, or otherwise marked off by type of distinctive character. How we should love to dwell on the texts which, like burning lamps, have lighted pilgrims on their way, which with bread of life have fed them on angels' food, which were as good to them as "the smooth stones out of the brook" to David in smiting the Goliath of temptation to the earth, and as the sword of the giant in cutting off his head,—which gave them "songs in the house of their pilgrimage," when they sang praises to God, and presented them with a staff to lean upon when they were walking through the valley of the shadow of death and passing into the hidden mystery of the eternal state. Now here we are referred to such a text,—to a text which had probably been the instrument of the psalmist's conversion, and which had certainly instructed and encouraged him in the exercises of

Divine communion, — "Thou saidst, Seek ye M face."

The text referred to is commonly believed to b taken from that in Deuteronomy, "But if from then thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find Him thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul Few readers of the Bible seem to occupy themselv in a practical way with Deuteronomy. As intimate in its name, it is like a duplicate, or second edition, the law; and on this account, it is not, perhaps, highly appreciated or so attentively considered. Bu there is no vain repetition in it, as indeed there is n vain repetition in any part of Scripture. That much of it is taken up with repetition,—"precep upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon lin line upon line,"—is rather an indication of the impor ance of that repetition. Besides, the book has its ow peculiar and most instructive lessons, which are not t be found elsewhere; and if we pass it by, or in an way neglect it, we do what neither David nor David Lord ever thought of doing. In the temptation of ou Lord, the texts which were quoted by Him, in repe ling the solicitations and suggestions of the tempte were certainly all taken from it.

To proceed to the consideration of the text itself the two parts into which it naturally divides itself– the reference and the response, first separately, an then in their connection — may now occupy ou attention.

I. The Reference.

"Thou saidst, Seek ye My face." The words, "Thou saidst," are supplemented in our version. In the original, there is an abrupt ellipsis. That the reference indicated by them was intended by the psalmist is nevertheless indisputable. It was in his Bible that he found it said, or as good as said, "Seek ye My face." This is in very deed the word of the Lord. Observe (1), *How brief it is.* Though a text of but four syllables, it is in itself a Bible; so much is in it, and this much so good. Plainly faith does not require the complete revelation of the Bible to warrant and sustain its exercise. In general, it is not a long passage, but a short sentence, like the point of an arrow striking the mark, or the edge of a sword cutting through and through by a single blow, that does it. The servants of Benhadad did diligently observe whether any thing would come from Ahab, and when Ahab said "He is my brother," how hastily they caught at it and said, "Thy brother Benhadad." Similarly faith will catch at a single word; in the poorest promise of the Scriptures, in even half of such a promise, it will find a mine of grace, a well of love, the heart of God. Nor is it difficult to understand how so brief an utterance should suffice in such a case. In the music of the finest composers, one idea is commonly found pervading a whole piece. You may follow it through all the changes whether of measure

or of key. Be the expression what it may—quiet, slow, fast, strong, major, or minor—strain of tenderness, burst of thunder-sound, the idea still comes out in harmony unique. So in the Bible. One idea, that of grace, the grace of God in Christ Jesus, is diffused all through it. You find it everywhere from Genesis to Revelation, and often concentrated in a chapter, or in a paragraph of a chapter, sometimes in a sentence, sometimes in a word.

Hence it is that so many can sympathise with the dying testimony of one of the greatest theologians of modern times.* "All my theology is comprised in that one verse. 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.'" And hence again it is that such a text; lit upon, it may be, by the merest accident, incidentally heard perhaps from the lips of a little child, has been ever so often made effective to the conversion of the sinner and the comfort of the saint; that even the careless opening of the Bible has been known, on bringing such a text quite unexpectedly into view, to be attended, as in the case of Hedley Vicars, with these results. It is not indeed uncommon to find that but one word, as the word "freely" in the texts, "Being justified freely by His grace—" "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely,—" has so opened up the gospel of the grace of God as to produce a "joy unspeakable, and

* J. A. Alexander, New York.

full of glory." As Watts so sweetly sings in his paraphrase of the psalm—

> "And when my spirit takes her fill
> At some good word of Thine;
> Not warriors, who divide the spoil,
> Have joys compared to mine."

That the reference of David in the text should be to a verse, or fragment of a verse, so brief as this, "Seek ye My face," is accordingly no marvel. Brief as it is, there is in it such a revelation, so comprehensive and so suggestive, of the grace of God.

2. *How precise it is.*—It admits no vagueness, no ambiguity of meaning, no mysterious uncertainty. It is quite distinct and definite. "He may run that readeth it;" and, for all his haste, not misconstrue its meaning. Some one or other of the sages of ancient heathenism is reported to have said—"If Jupiter speak, He will use the language of Plato." According to this idea, the language of philosophy should be the language of the Deity in any spoken or written revelation of Himself. But how stands the fact? "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" Here in the Bible is a revelation from heaven—a Divine revelation. And what kind of a revelation is it? How plain. How homely. How perspicuous. The very mind of God is unveiled in it—so different in this respect from heathen oracles which were always worded so as to mean any thing or nothing. It is true that commentators often veil the meaning by the

elaboration of their thought and style, so that men of simple mind do not understand them—"cannot steadfastly look to the end" or gracious purport of the truth in Christ which shall never be "abolished." But there is no veil upon itself. When you are at a loss to make out the meaning of this or of that expositor, lay aside his exposition, turn to the word, or to Him whose word it is, and you will not be kept in perplexity about it.

> "God is His own Interpreter,
> And He will make it plain."

No doubt, it is in a sense so deep that, as the Fathers were wont to say, "an elephant may swim in it"—"an angel cannot fathom it;" but, as they also said, it is at the same time so shallow that "a child, a very lamb, may wade in it." Take this text of David's—"Seek ye My face." Is it not plain enough? Who can mistake its meaning? "The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein."

> "Oh! how unlike the complex works of man,
> Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan! . . .
> Too many, shocked at what should charm them most,
> Despise its plain direction, and are lost."*

3. *How affectionate it is.*—"Seek ye My face." What condescension! What benignity! What gracious loving-kindness! It might have been, "Depart—Keep at a distance from Me—Ye cannot see My face

* W. Cowper, "Truth."

and live." But, no. "Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth," and to be beheld by them in turn as well? For, indeed, He does not stand aloof in state and ceremony, like the magnates of the earth who know that familiarity would deprive them of respect. It is alike His desire and His delight to be seen and known. And hence from all His works a voice may be heard by men, commanding "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they may feel after Him and find Him." And "there is no speech nor language where His voice may not be heard." It speaks in every land, and to every nation. It speaks in blessing and in chastening too; and it always utters the same word, "Seek ye Me, and ye shall live." Besides, the Divine voice has itself spoken in the explicit revelation of the Bible. "Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth. O sing praises unto the LORD; to Him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens: lo, He doth send out His voice, and that a mighty voice." And what saith it? "Of the things which it hath spoken this is the sum:" "Seek ye My face." O, blessed word, Beloved, why should any of us be strangers to the LORD? How comes it that so many have yet to say, "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there: and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him?" "Is there not a cau-

doubt, there is. And where? Not in the LORD. No, no. It is only in yourselves.

> "Go, search this thing:
> Tumble thy breast, and turn thy book;
> If thou hadst lost a glove or ring,
> Wouldst thou not look?"

The Achan in the camp, "the accursed thing" that "troubleth" you, let it be searched out, and "stoned with stones," and "burnt with fire," and "utterly destroyed." "Take with you words, and turn to the LORD; say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

Let us now attend to

II. THE RESPONSE.

By thousands upon thousands the reference is left unanswered, so that this, as the response of faith, deserves to be all the more valued and considered.

Observe 1. *How practical it is.*—It is "the obedience of faith." It does what is required, and it does it readily—does it hopefully. And faith, as thus a duty to which they should attend, is always incumbent on the hearers of the word. That this is questioned by some is true. Because the gospel speaks of faith as a grace of the Spirit and the gift of God, they say that it cannot be considered to be a duty. But the gospel has no manner of doubt about it. It unquestionably

represents it as a duty. It adduces the authority of God as positively demanding it. "And this is His commandment that we should believe on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment." Surely this should put an end to everything like controversy and dubiety about the matter. We set up as our own masters, if we are not "obedient to the faith." It is at the peril of our soul if we reject the counsel of God against ourselves—if we remain impenitent and unbelieving. Here is the word of the LORD; and it is as "full of majesty" as it is of mercy. There is the promise in it; but not that only. There is the precept too; and what is wanted by it is obedience, positive and prompt obedience, nothing else, and nothing less. "LORD, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." Oh, when will men cease to hear the word in that wayward, wilful spirit which, like the restive horse, moves backwards at its master's call, instead of on. That was an admirable commentary of a little child on the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." "I suppose," said the child, "they do His will in heaven without asking any questions." It is the very obedience this which is required. No lifeless inattention which fails to move either arms or limbs. No ague-like indecision which halts, with shivering frame and tottering step, between submission and revolt. No roundabout evasion which, with double-tongued hypocrisy, starts this diffi-

culty and that. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face," what then? Let me think of it. Answer me first this question. How shall I do it? Where shall I do it? But there is a lion in the path. Nothing of the kind. The "straightway," so often found in the Gospel according to Mark is here exemplified. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

Observe 2. *How simple it is.*—It is but an answer, an echo, to a word,—the answer, the echo, of the heart to the word of the LORD. And this is faith, the faith of Holy Scripture, the faith which saves the soul. To many the question, "What is faith?" has been most puzzling. They have pondered it both much and long; but they are as far from a satisfied result as ever. Nor have their speculations been very useful in brightening their views with any heart-relieving measure of clearness or of comfort. The truth is that many, if not most, of the explanations it has received, as sown broadcast in the field of religious literature, have done not a little to increase, rather than diminish the perplexity.

How grateful to turn from theorizings and philosophizings to the simple Bible. No puzzles, no enigmas here. If we give up human glosses, and "steadfastly look" into the word itself, we shall come to "see the heavens opened," and to hear the LORD'S voice so addressing us in offers and promises of grace, that the very faith, in respect of which we have been so puzzled,

will be awakened and made to echo back those promises and offers with the full symphony in chorus of a heart Amen. "I reasoned, and debated, and investigated." said a Christian philosopher * in triumphing over death, "but I found no peace till I came to the Gospel as a little child, till I received it as a very babe." And so it always is. It is not the man who questions intellectually the most, and reasons logically the most, and it may be the best as well; it is the man, who, with true simplicity, takes the word of the LORD as it is addressed to him, and receives its testimony, whatever it is, as the very truth most sure, who, without waiting for any other or further encouragement of any kind, at once rests himself upon the credit of the naked word; it is this man who comes easiest over every stumbling-stone into the exercises and experiences of faith. Let others inquire and argue; he does nothing of the kind; he silently submits. Let others challenge and debate; it is enough for him that the LORD hath spoken; and, as content with that, Oh the serenity he feels; he is kept "in perfect peace," because his "mind is stayed" upon the LORD. "When Thou saidst, seek ye My face." Again, what then? "My heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek." This is faith. There is neither genius, nor philosophy, nor science, nor erudition, in it. It is simply voice answering to voice, heart echoing to heart, the voice of man to the voice of the LORD, the heart of man to the heart of the LORD.

* Dr. William Gordon, of Hull.

Observe once more, 3. *How cordial it is.*—The heart is in it, the heart as directed and sustained by the Divine word. It would have been good for nothing had it not been so. "The heart is the theologian." And for our part we say, "The heart is the saint also." You know how divines have made it a matter of dispute whether the faith of the Gospel is an intellectual or a moral act, an exercise of mind, or an exercise of heart. One is tempted to pray, when listening to their logomachies, "Save me from the polemics of theologians. Hide me from the strife of tongues." But indeed it is strange how there should ever have been any controversy about the matter. If faith were an exercise of the mind alone, it might be clear, but it would be cold. Or, if it were an exercise of the heart alone, it might be distinguished for the warmth of its devotion, but it would have ignorance for the mother of that devotion. According to the Bible, it is an exercise of both mind and heart, it is alike intelligent and affectionate together; the whole mental and moral being of the believing man is at once concerned and concurrent in it; or, as Bunyan puts it in his Holy War, my Lord Will-be-Will and Mr. Conscience the Recorder, as well as my Lord Understanding and Mr. Knowledge are hand in glove and heart in hand with the whole town of Mansoul in its surrender to Prince Emmanuel. "My son give Me thine heart." "If thou believest with all thine heart." "With the heart, man believeth unto righteousness." And here

also is the text with its testimony to the same effect; "When Thou saidst, seek ye My face," it is not my reason only with its clear logic that replies; there is more than my understanding in the reply; my conscience, my will, my soul, is in it; "My heart said unto Thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

There still remains another topic in the text, but it is too large and too suggestive to be satisfactorily disposed of in the conclusion of this discourse.

III.—THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE REFERENCE AND THE RESPONSE.

Let me simply instance two observations which might have been profitably dwelt upon.

1. *The reference elicits the response.*—It is the voice which calls out the echo. There can be no echo otherwise. Silence the voice, and the echo is silenced too. And so there is no seeking the Lord unasked, no going in into the court of even His gracious presence uncalled. Let Him hold out His golden sceptre, and kindly say, "Seek ye My face," and then we are warranted, every way warranted, to go in. It is no presumption then to say, "Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

2. *The response fulfils the reference.*—And herein consists the virtue, the value of it. Any of you who have been in the Swiss valleys will remember how at certain places a peasant of the district blew a horn,

and immediately the hills around repeated the sound, echoing and re-echoing it again and again and ever so often and so long, entrancing the ear with quite a strain of tunefully drawn out and delightful melody. And so is it here, "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face,"—notice the response; how timely and true it is; it is precisely as it ought to be; just the thing required; let it be sounded out again and again and still again, not by one merely, but by every one, one by one, in distinct personal yet unbroken concentrated succession.—"Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

Now *learn here the nature of true religion.* It is *conversion* to the LORD, and *communion* with the LORD by the instrumentality of the word. *Conversion* may, no doubt, be brought about by means which appear to be distinct and different from the word. The title of a tract, with the word eternity in it, is known to have awakened a votary of fashion and turned her from frivolity to God. The couplet is said to have been written in pencil on the cover of a letter held by a man who was found lying dead beside his horse,—

> "Between the saddle and the ground,
> I mercy sought, and mercy found."

Not a few have been quite unexpectedly and almost unaccountably translated from darkness into light, in the most unlikely places, as in a ball-room, a theatre, a casino, and by the most unlikely means, as by a casual remark, a snatch of a song, and even a profane oath. Yet in all these cases, the word was really,

although not manifestly, at work; it was, in fact, the word which, if not immediately, at least indirectly, did the work. I do not believe in any conversion which claims to be independent of it.

And so with *communion*. It may, no doubt, appear on some occasions to be sustained in an element, an atmosphere, far above the reach and influence of the word. "For the LORD," as Ralph Erskine says, "is pleased sometimes to satisfy His people with the sweetness of His fruits without putting them to the trouble of believing a bare word,"—"by sensible comforts, and warm sun-blinks, perhaps but once in a lifetime; or, as in Jacob's case, twenty years between one sweet Bethel and another, he sometimes gives faith a breathing." * You may have heard of the ecstacy of Flavel, one of the most sensible and sagacious of Puritan divines, with nothing like fanaticism in him,—how he said of his experience to the standers-by when they were washing away the blood which had flowed from him, unconsciously to himself, during its continuance,—"I did verily think that, if I was not then in heaven, I could hardly hope to be more blessed in heaven than I was then." You may have also heard of the raptures of Tennant of America, who had sometimes, it is said, to be almost carried, when in them, into the pulpit, where he would lean over with uplifted hands, and say such glorious things of Christ that they who saw him thought and felt as if they had been looking on

* Works ix. 87-88.

the face of an angel. Yet again, in even such cases, I venture to say, although it really belongs to a department of experience of which I have no knowledge, that the truth of the word, the gracious discovery of its supernatural revelation, if not the letter of the word, is after all the chariot of fire on which the soul mounts into the joys of heavenly fellowship as in the chariots of Aminadib.

Be this as it may, it was a good description of communion in its ordinary characteristics which was given by a simple-minded Christian—to some it may not appear to be supernatural enough, but it aptly expresses the "more excellent way,"—"I open my Bible, and the LORD speaks to me; I shut my Bible, and then I speak to Him." So here with David. And so may it likewise be with us. "Thou saidst, Seek ye My Face." This is the voice of the LORD. O, that it may now come home by the demonstration of the Spirit to every heart here present. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee. Thy face, LORD, will I seek." This is the word of faith. O, that it were now called forth by the persuasion of the Spirit from every heart here present. Then would there be conversion, and communion,—conversion by the Holy Ghost,—communion in the Holy Ghost.

Learn here also the value of the word as the means of conversion and communion.—How it should be attentively perused and heard, and faithfully considered

and applied. "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the LORD endureth for ever." Moses was long dead when David lived, but what the LORD said by Moses was not dead: David found it still a living word; and here we see what good he got of it,—how much of benefit and blessing. Nor is it dead now, any more than then. David is dead as well as Moses. "Our fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever?" We are in their place. Their Bible is our Bible; and it should be every thing to us that it was to them. "For whatsoever Scriptures were written aforetime were written for our learning that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope."

No doubt, there are things in the Bible of specific application; they properly belonged to the times at which it was written, and the persons to whom it was immediately addressed; but they are not such as to detract from its standard value; and besides, putting aside, as may be easily enough done, what is really specific, there is still that about the things, or the record of them, which is permanently useful, and in respect of which we may apply it to ourselves with propriety and profit. For instance, that old promise spoken by the LORD from the ladder-top in heaven to Jacob at the ladder-foot on earth, "For I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken

to thee of," is taken up nearly two thousand years afterwards, and addressed to the Hebrew Christians of that day as no less applicable in the perfect fulness of its virtue to them—"For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." There is, in fact, no portion of the Divine word which can be said to be out of date, and of no further use. We may, like David here, go back upon some of even the oldest parts of it, and find them every way as profitable as ever.

It is a question which may still be put and pressed accordingly—"What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Cursorily—carelessly—as one reads an article in a magazine or a newspaper? This will never do. You must dig for gold and gems. They will never come into your hand unsought—without the labour of a search. The familiar words of Luther may be cited in this connection—"Pause at any verse of Scripture, and shake it as it were every bough of it, that, if possible, some fruit at least may drop down to you." "If your soul really hungers, the Spirit of God will not send you away empty. You shall at length find in one—perhaps a short verse in Scripture—such an abundance of delicious fruit that you will gladly seat yourself under its shade, and abide there, as under a tree laden with fruit." After all, it is only when the heart is brought into practical sympathy with the word that the word becomes really profitable to us. When, at length, convinced by Robert Haldane's Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans that the total corruption

of human nature is plainly taught by the Apostle Paul, Merle D'Aubigné remarked, "Now I do indeed see this doctrine in the Bible," and then the expositor turned and said with the most pointed application, "Yes, Merle; but do you see it in your heart?" The observation was simple enough; but it proved the turning point in the spiritual history of D'Aubigné. Let it also here be taken home. It is the witness of the Spirit in the heart answering to the witness of the Spirit in the word that constitutes religion—heart religion. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, thy face, LORD, will I seek." So, here it is—the assurance of faith created and sustained by the assurance of faithfulness. May this experience be realized by us —now—and ever—"Thy words were found of me, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by Thy Name, O LORD God of hosts." Amen.

SERMON IV.

BREAD CAST UPON THE WATERS.

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days."—ECCLESIASTES xi. 1.

THERE are two books in the Bible—the books of Job and Ecclesiastes—the instruction of which is often missed by cursory and careless readers. Many, who entirely overlook the general drift and purpose of the books, take all the different parts of them to be independently and Divinely true; whereas some parts are very far from being so; the sense which they are intended to bear is anything but true. The speeches of Job's three friends, for instance, are all wrong. That there is much in them that is sound and in every way correct must be acknowledged, but such truth as they contain is entirely misapplied; and, to this extent, they are quite erroneous. We must view them in connection with the purposes for which they have been constructed in order to ascertain and appreciate the Divine meaning in them. Similarly, the key to the Book of Ecclesiastes must be obtained and applied in order to enter the sacred temple of its instruction. According to the late Dr James Hamilton, of London, in whose views of the book I generally concur, it forms

a summary of life experience; but this experience is not throughout religious, nor is it in many parts either commendable or imitable. So far the account of it answers to the record of a diary or journal, and this record is that of a life which had been very much misspent and thrown away. The royal Preacher, as he is commonly called, appears to have been at one time a worn-out voluptuary, and at another time a grumbling misanthrope—at one time a philosophical thinker, and at another time an indefatigable artificer —almost "everything by turns but nothing long;" and the practical lesson of this ever-changing record is evidently meant to be one of interdict or prohibition, "Do not follow me in the weary go-round of senseless living. Let my life-story with its record of habitual failure be as a beacon to ward you off the rocks and shoals and quicksands of inevitable shipwreck."

Towards the end of the Book the meaning of the Preacher is not in the least obscure; and at all events he makes it plain that he is anxiously intent on persuading others to avoid the course of life he had travelled over, and, under the direction of the wisdom that is from above, to begin where he had ended:— "Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man," or, as he expresses Himself in his affectionate counsel to the young, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." The Preacher was evidently coming to his right mind when he gave utterance to the text, in which we have one

of a few proverbial sayings, the practical wisdom of which enforces itself with quite convincing evidence. The reference of the saying is commonly and, I dare say, correctly interpreted of the gifts of charity and kindness. To lay up riches for heirs who will likely waste and lose them, or spend them on the indulgences of mere self-gratification, is most unsatisfying. How unspeakably more profitable to lay them out in deeds of practical beneficence. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days."

The allusion here is somewhat uncertain. It has been referred to the Egyptian practice, when the annual inundation of the Nile is well-nigh subsided, of sowing rice-seed upon the muddy soil with a view to the fruitful returns of harvest. It has also been referred to the enterprise of merchants as rewarded by the large success of their ventures in maritime commerce when their ships, like those of Solomon in the Mediterranean and the Red seas, return with richly laden freights of foreign produce. It has been even referred to an apparently useless sowing of seed on the bed of the sea, as certain after all to be remunerative in the case of the kindness which "does good and lends, hoping for nothing again." Whatever the allusion, there is an Oriental legend related by Tholuck in his "Hours of Christian Devotion" which affords a

rather taking illustration of its meaning. One of the Caliphs had a favourite boy who was one day, when bathing and swimming in the Tigris, carried away by the current of the river, and apparently lost notwithstanding all the efforts which were made to save him. The disaster occasioned the greatest distress to the Caliph who put on mourning and wore it for some days. At the expiry of this period he offered a thousand pieces of gold to any of the boatmen and divers on the river who should find the body and bring it to obtain an honourable burial. Shortly afterwards a boatman, who was ushered into the presence of the monarch, addressed him—"O Caliph, I come to thee with the delight of thine eyes; behold, he is not dead; he is here in life;" and thereupon the little fellow was brought in alive and well. On inquiry, the lad explained that, as he was being swept away by the current farther and farther down the stream, swimming as best he could for life, he at last clutched at the branch of a tree which overhung a very precipitous part of the river-bank, whereupon pulling himself up by the tree, he found a cave just above the water-level, into the recess of which he crept for refuge. Next morning, when he began to think that, though saved from drowning, it was only to meet a more horrible death by hunger, he was astonished to find a wooden platter floating to the mouth of the cave with twenty cakes spread out upon it which furnished him with a day's excellent repast. The same thing

occurred from day to day as long as he remained in the cave, and he had observed that the name of a person belonging to the city was imprinted on each and every one of the cakes. Much astonished at the story, the Caliph ordered this person to be brought before him, and, in answer to his inquiries, was informed that the daily action of the townsman in the matter was prompted by the Scripture which saith—"Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days."

Make whatever you please of this legendary illustration, but the practical lesson ought not to be lost sight of. This lesson may be said to lie on the very surface, so that it may be readily enough learned. Still it is much too generally overlooked; and, on this account, the facts upon which it is based deserve to be articulately emphasized. They may be here at least noted. For instance, beneficence should be shown in a specifically *substantial* form. It is "bread," the food of life, the necessary sustenance of human existence, that is to be "cast upon the waters." To substitute kind wishes, compassionate speeches, for friendly actions, cordial charities, is an outrage upon goodness. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?" "To deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" Secondly, beneficence should be the positive outcome of *self-sacrifice.* Its gifts

should not be such as cost one nothing; they should not be provided out of the means which are required to pay lawful debts and other moral obligations. A bountiful hand draws upon personal income alone for its gracious ministries. Its charity is built upon honesty. It is first just, then generous. "Cast thy bread,"—"*thy* bread." *Bountifulness* should also distinguish this beneficence. The crumbs which fall from the rich man's table, the scraps which are doled out at the servant's door, are not to be here accounted of. "The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." "*Cast* thy bread." Let it not be extorted from you. Let it be given "heartily," "not by constraint, but willingly." The "cheerful giver" is the acceptable giver. "Freely ye have received, freely give." And this liberality should be still further shown *without consideration of a recompense.* To ask or expect any return from the beneficiaries of our kindness is selfish, mercenary. "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee." "Cast thy bread upon *the waters,*" where, however it may benefit others, no promise is given of benefit to thyself.

At the same time, what is thus given away by a generous hand is never lost. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." "The

liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." If this is not verified in temporals, it will certainly be in spirituals. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth." "For with the measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again." "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days."

But now, to pass from this interpretation with its own practical application, although most pointed in its significance, the text is plainly a proverbial saying, of which other applications may as well be made. Let me, therefore proceed to apply it to the dissemination of the Word,—of the truth of the Gospel. This is not an unwarrantable application of it. It is one which is well sustained by manifold Scriptures, so that no vindication of it is required. The precept and the promise of the saying may be considered in turn, and I trust, as I do desire and pray, with practical benefit and blessing.

I. The Precept.

It is tinged in its expression by an Oriental colouring, but there is nothing that is in the least mystical or recondite about it, so that there is no occasion to say a single word in its interpretation that can be considered fantastic or far-fetched.

1. *The seed* which it prescribes may be first of all attended to. It is called "bread." The original word is usually so rendered, but in at least one passage it is

unquestionably used for "seed,"—"Thy bread-corn is bruised"; and evidently it ought to be taken as bearing the same sense here. Poetically we speak of seed in a rather loose kind of way; but literally it is "a bare grain, it may chance of wheat or of some other grain," a mere pellet of vegetation with potencies of life which, if sown in a fruitful soil, may multiply a hundredfold, a thousandfold. We now take it for the precious seed of Holy Scripture, the bread-corn of spiritual and eternal life. This view of it is adopted in the parable, "A sower went forth to sow." "The seed is the word of God." The Bible is, in fact, all seed together. Every part of it is itself a seed. How often a single verse of it has taken root in a human heart, and germinated, and expanded, and fructified beyond all estimate or understanding. Take the words of Jesus,—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,"—what fruit has come of them? Who can tell how many thousands of thousands have lived the very life of God upon them? What, in the estimation of many, can be thought more commonplace? Yet what unspeakable grace-potencies are in the words; it will require eternity to unfold all the blessing of which they have been made the means. How every page of the Bible would be lit with surpassing glory, if we only knew a thousandth part of the salvation-grace and blessing which has been conveyed to men in every age and in every land by its ever so precious words.

2. And *the sowing* of the seed should therefore be also well attended to. The seed of sin does not require sowing. Like the seed of thistledown it sows itself, and, wherever it finds a soil, it grows like rankest weeds and tares, destroying every valuable crop. Ever so many are perhaps unconsciously and even perceptibly spreading evil broadcast on every hand, and at all events they are successful in the business without the forth-putting of even the slightest effort. On the other hand, if the valleys are to be covered over with corn, they must be tilled and sown; the processes of a careful husbandry must be brought to bear upon them; there can be no remunerative harvest without continuous labour. Too many are content to pray for the dissemination of the word and the extension of the Gospel-kingdom. They do nothing else. They are neither employers of labour, nor themselves labourers. But prayer and pains should go together. The religion which spends itself in merely thinking and feeling, however much may be made of it, is, as practically unproductive, of very little worth. Possibly enough, it may be able to flatter itself with the fond promise, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," but, in such a case, the rebuke is in every way deserved, "Thou fool." To invest in Home and Foreign Missions is the part of wisdom. Our means may be but small, and our encouragements but few; yet, if dutifully used as opportunity is given, who knows what benefit may

ensue? "Cast thy bread." "Send it away," the word is. "In the morning, sow thy seed; and, in the evening, withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether both shall be alike good."

3. Then again, *the soil* in which the seed is sown is generally much attended to. The precise import of the textual reference to the waters is, as already noticed, involved in some uncertainty, and, for my part, I am pleased to have it left in this uncertainty. If the waters indicate the river-irrigated fields of the Jordan-valley or the Nile-watered plains of the land of Egypt on the subsidence of the annual inundation, we are plainly taught to improve every opportunity of sowing the good seed on good soil, as in the home-circle, the Sabbath-school and the sick-chamber. There are occasions when the heart is more impressible and receptive, as during the period of youth and the season of affliction; and, when the waters are then irrigating, softening, and fertilizing the soil, it is most dutiful to take advantage of the opportunity for scattering the seed. To narrow the duty of the text by this interpretation, would nevertheless be wrong. Following out other interpretations of the allusion, it may be no less dutiful to cast our bread upon the waters, as merchants ship their goods at a venture to foreign ports; and, like the argosies of Solomon to Tarshish and to Ophir, an ample return may be readily counted on; or even to cast it upon soils which are quite as

uncongenial and as unpromising for agricultural operations as the waters of the ocean, assured that it will not be thrown away, and that a return, if not in one way, will be obtained in another. We know that our Father which is in heaven maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust; and ought not we, as His sons and daughters, to follow His example? Every one of us has heard of the famous reply made by Dr. John Erskine in the old General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, when it had been argued that the Christianization of India by means of missions ought to be postponed till after the country was prepared for the Gospel by means of a previous civilisation, "Moderator, rax me that Bible. It is here written, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.'" Plainly the precept of the text is not unwarrantably taken in this its utmost, its most far-reaching sense.

II. The Promise.

This comes in most seasonably on the back of such a precept, and its expressiveness is not instructive merely; it is most encouraging; nothing could be better; it is every way most worthy of the heartiest consideration and acceptation. Let us distinctly notice what may be gathered from it.

1. *The bread cast upon the waters appears to be thrown away and lost.* What else is visible, discernible, upon even the sowing of the seed in ground which has been prepared for it by the plough. To bury precious grain does not bear the aspect of a wise proceeding. Sometimes children dig it up, and they find it spoiled. Like many, they have not learned the lesson, "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." How often the Christian mother finds that all her prayerful instruction in the religious upbringing of her family is, so far as she can judge, quite unavailing. There are no signs of grace in her sons and daughters, no marks to distinguish them in this respect from unbaptised heathens. Sabbath school teachers labour under manifold discouragements of a similar kind. Complaints of spending their labour for nought and in vain are very common with them. And ministers and missionaries too are ever and again repeating the same story. We have all heard them bitterly lamenting, like the old prophets, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed!" "The word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision. Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His Name."

2. And then again, *the discouragement of obtaining no return from the bread cast upon the waters may be very much prolonged.* To many this is quite unbearable. Like children who find that they have destroyed

their seeds by pushing away the earth to see if they are growing, they lose heart, and abandon all expectation of any produce. It is forgotten how, in the parable, it is said of the seed which "immediately sprang up" that, "when the sun was up, it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away." No doubt there are cases, not a few, in which the seed-time and the fruit-time are very little separated from one another. On the day of Pentecost the word of the Lord had free course, and was glorified in the instantaneous conversion of thousands. To be habitually postponing the expectation of gospel fruitfulness to a law of husbandry, the operation and outcome of which should always be long waited for, is therefore plainly wrong. "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest." The interval between sowing and reaping is not invariable. It is often short. Even child-conversion is as possible as it is desirable, and it is not infrequent. If the period is longer—and the text is most instructive in its notation, "After many days"—there must be no abandonment of duty or of hope. Let labour and expectation continue their course together—the mother, the teacher, the minister, the missionary, still toiling on and looking up—pursuing the object of their toil, however faint they be, girding up the loins of their mind, and hoping to the end. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." "So is the king-

th of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how."

3. After all, *the bread cast upon the waters will yet be found to be abundantly remunerating.* The stories which might be told of the harvests of blessing which have been gathered from it in providence and in grace are numberless. The word of the gospel, like the gift of generosity, shall not return void; it shall prosper in the thing whereto it has been sent. That the sower may not be himself the reaper here is true enough. "One soweth, and another reapeth," is a saying which is ever so often verified in the history of Christian labour. It may be only on the golden pavement, beside the crystal stream which makes glad the paradise above, that the Christian parent will find his long lost children in beatified spirits, at length brought home to glory by means of the religious instructions which he never knew in life to be effectual.

John Flavel once preached an uncommonly impressive sermon from the words, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha." Before pronouncing the benediction at the conclusion of the service, he stood still for a short time, looking over the congregation, and then, in the dead silence, said with much greater impressiveness than ever,—"How shall I now bless this assembly, when every person in it who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ is

anathema maranatha?" The effect was electrical. Ever so many of the congregation were overcome by their emotions, and some quite fainted away. Among those present there was a lad named Luke Short, about fifteen years of age, who appeared to be quite unaffected by the preacher's words. Shortly afterwards, he left the country for America, where he remained during the rest of his life, which was singularly extended over more than a hundred years. One day, in reflecting, after he was a hundred years old, on the history of his long life, he remembered the solemn words of Flavel, with the effect produced upon the congregation; and the remembrance was at once attended with deep conviction of his sin in standing out so long against the invitations of the Gospel; he felt that, as one who loved not the Lord Jesus Christ, he was now, as he had been all along, underlying the anathema maranatha; and what he should do to be saved, then became his anxious and great concern. Mercifully he was led of the Spirit to the cross; and, being added to the Lord, he was also added to the church, and for sixteen years thereafter evinced the sincerity of his repentance towards God and his faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ by a life and conversation becoming the Gospel. Probably many ministers, like Flavel in this case of Short's, will never know, till the decisions of eternity, the blessed issues of their fidelity in the service of the Gospel.

At any rate, however little the sowers may themselves

see it, the fruit of the bread cast upon the waters may be seen by others to be extraordinarily abundant here. When Matthew Henry was quite a boy, he heard his father preach a sermon on the parable of the mustard seed, and, on going home, he said to a child sister, "I think I have received a seed of grace." And who can tell how that seed of grace, small as a grain of mustard seed, has since grown and multiplied by means of his "Commentary" and other writings a thousandfold, a million-fold. Richard Baxter somewhere relates that the reading of Sibbes's "Bruised Reed" was the means of his conversion. The conversion of Philip Doddridge was brought about in turn by the reading of Richard Baxter's "Now or Never," and that of William Wilberforce by the reading of Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul;" while that of Legh Richmond, the pious author of the "Dairyman's Daughter," and other similar works of religious value, was effected by the reading of Wilberforce's "View of Practical Christianity." Oh, the ingatherings of such an evangelical succession—how delightful! But what will be the joy of the great feast of all the great ingatherings in eternity? It used to be said by the Jews of old that they who had never seen the joy of their feast of ingathering, had never seen anything that deserved to be called joy; and both they and we shall say *that* again, in heaven, of the "joy unspeakable and full of glory" with which the final ingathering of redemption will

pervade eternity in its full transcendant blessedness. How the very anticipation of the Divine approval, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," should of itself authenticate and send home the text, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."

Let me now offer three concluding practical remarks—

1. First, *You should take care that pure and proper seed be sown.* Let it be seed-corn, whether barley, or wheat, or some other grain, from the growth of which bread or other nourishing food may be obtained. The seed of weeds and tares should be sifted out, and in some way destroyed. We must do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. By some, religious teaching is very much confined to the inculcation of Scriptural doctrine, as if the religion of the Bible were of faith only; while, on the part of others, religious teaching is as much, or perhaps even more, confined to the inculcation of Scriptural duty, as if the religion of the Bible were of conduct only. How can either way be right? Oxygen alone will never make the fluid of the atmosphere. Hydrogen alone will never make the water of the ocean. Red beams alone will never make the light-rays of the sun. The Bible—the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible—is the seed-corn, the bread-corn, upon which religious faith and religious life are both alike sustained in combination;

and what God has thus joined together, let not man put asunder.

2. *You should alike take care that the seed be sown in a right spirit.* There were those who, during Paul's imprisonment at Rome, preached Christ out of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to his bonds; but, with true nobility of mind, the apostle rose above the consideration of their rivalry, and rejoiced that Christ was preached, no matter how. Still it must not be supposed that the spirit in which this or other religious work is done is of small account. There is an apostolical expression which deserves to be much considered in the present connection for its telling point and power,—"Speaking the truth in love!" In love! In love to God! In love to men! In love to the truth itself! This is the spirit of the Gospel, the spirit of the Master; and, in all work for Him, let it be both yours and mine.

3. *You should take care that the seed be sown in prayer, looking up for the outpouring of the Spirit, the downflowing of the plenteous rain; and in faith too, fully persuaded that what God hath promised He is able also to perform.* If we were thus prayerful and believing, would we not be more successful, would not God be sure to give the increase? Is it not written, "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall

My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." * "Prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes; and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed; for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts." † Amen.

* Isa. lv. 10, 11. † Mal. iii. 10-12.

SERMON V.

THE UNCOMMON FAITH.

"But I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me."—PSALM xl. 17.

IT is said to be a mark of genius that it does not care to repeat itself. I am sure that it is not a mark of grace. That cannot be said to have much possession of the heart which seldom if ever rises to the lip and life. The utterance of the text occurs twice in the Psalms, at least in substance, while the sentiment to which it gives expression is of frequent occurrence; and on this account it is, as a gracious utterance, the more emphatically expressive. How often others than the Psalmist have adopted it in the Cardiphonia of their own religious experience. It was one of dear General Anderson's dying utterances.* I well remember the eager upward look of intensest faith and feeling by which it was accompanied. The second Dr M'Crie used to tell how, when taking a walk shortly after his illustrious father's death, he was startled and much impressed by a poor imbecile, whom he accosted in passing with the conventional salutation, "How do ye do to-day?" replying with a

* See *ante* p. 20.

pleasant countenance and a touching simplicity, "I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinketh upon me." Now, I earnestly desire that you and I were also warranted to adopt this utterance as our own; and it is with this desire that I have turned to it at present. It will be very sad if my object should be defeated or even marred by any fault in my speaking or in your hearing; and therefore I would have you unite with me in asking that the LORD Himself would direct our meditation, and attend it, too, with the blessing of an abiding heart-application in both its progress and its result.

The two parts of the text form an antithesis of the most divergent contrast. Darkness and light are not more unlike, and we cannot help distinguishing between them. The order in which they stand invests them with considerable attractiveness; at least the interest with which we may now take them up, is not a little enhanced on this account.

> "Not first the bright, and after that the dark,
> But first the dark, and after that the bright;
> First the thick cloud, and then the rainbow's arc;
> First the dark grave, then resurrection-light." *

These two things in turn,—*a humble confession* and *a confident persuasion*,—have therefore to be attended to according to their order; and I very earnestly desire that the word of exposition may be found to be quite

* Dr Horace Bonar.

consistent with the witness of experience in your case as well as in my own.

I. The Humble Confession.

It is a confession which may be considered to be somewhat strange as coming from the Psalmist. Was He not a King, a powerful and prosperous Monarch, the very Anointed of the Lord? Was he not most gifted, too, with rich natural qualities in poetry and music, in sagacity and valour, in energy of will and fertility of resource? Was he not, in fact, whether as shepherd on the plain, or soldier in the field, or sovereign of the state, the foremost of his age? And besides, was he not a saint, a man of God, one after God's own heart, whose attainments in point of both religious privilege and experience were of the highest order? How could he speak of himself as poor and needy? Does not the employment of these expressions appear to be the outcome of something like hallucination, if not of hypocrisy or religious cant? Nay: the confession is quite unrelated to external circumstances, to natural gifts, and to even eminent acquirements, of whatever kind. There were, no doubt, occasions not a few in the history of the Psalmist when he might be most truly said to be both poor and needy, as when, both before and after his elevation to the throne, he was driven again and again into exile by the malice of murderous enemies; but, even in the heyday of his

royal state, there were dark passages of his life, upon which none but God and his own eyes had ever looked, and in the view of which he might well be anxious to withdraw on many an occasion from the pageantry of state into the privacy of his own chamber, so that he should be free to uncrown himself, disrobe himself, and in dust and ashes confess himself to be as "poor and needy" as the poorest and neediest in his kingdom. Nor let us speak of the Psalmist only. Is not the confession as appropriate to us, to every one of us, as it was to him? This may not be very readily acknowledged, except in the unmeaning formality of liturgical or pharisaical expression; but there is not a heart among us to the profoundest inner conviction of which it should fail to answer.

1. It is certainly in our case, as well as his, *a very becoming confession.* Take us at our best, what have we that we have not received, and that we can call independently our own? "For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." A steward is not considered rich, when all that he possesses is the property of his master. Be it that he lacks nothing, that he is even living in abundance: still he is only a dependant; let his master dismiss him, and where is he? And how can we afford to speak of wealth in all that we possess, of whatever kind? Are we better or richer than stewards? What stock have we on hand, what reserve in store, to which we can lay claim in independence of the LORD? Besides, what is our moral

nature? what is our personal history, as in the sight of God? Can we wipe our mouth, and say, I have done no wickedness? Can we presume to flatter ourselves with the fond assurance, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years," or to venture on the self-complacent flight or flourish, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are"? Verily, the virtue of self-resource amounts to nothing. From a moral or spiritual point of view, we are indeed as poor as poverty itself.

2. This confession should therefore be *unaffectedly veracious and sincere.* Can it be either desirable or reasonable that we should do anything by way of making ourselves out to be poor and needy, except as we really are so? What though the woman of Tekoa is cunning enough to drape herself in widow's weeds according to the advice of Joab, the weeds do not make a widow of her. Old cast-off clothing will never make any person poor. Many a proud pound is sewed up in the breast lining of a beggar's rags. The profession of poverty without the poverty itself is scandalous. Humiliation is not humility. To be made humble and to be humble may be as unlike each other as black and white. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;" but it is the spirit, not the bones, that must be broken. Oh, for that—the broken spirit, the contrite spirit, in the conscious impoverishment of its perfect nothingness, of its utter sinfulness, as before the LORD. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of

heaven." "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

3. After all, *it is only as the effect of a gracious operation of the Spirit that the confession of the text is ever candidly or cordially made.* Wrapped up in his self-conceit, what a proud boast was that of Ephraim of old, "Yet I am become rich; in all my labours they shall find none iniquity that were sin." And that of the more modern Laodicea was quite as offensively vain-glorious: "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." To the LORD there is hardly anything more odious. How He denounces it in sore displeasure! Of Ephraim He said, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone;" and of Laodicea, "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I will spue thee out of My mouth." We may be well assured that grace reigns in the lowly, the humble, the poor in spirit. It is of the Spirit that they are taught their poverty. To Him they owe their sense of nothingness. Enlightened by Him in the knowledge of themselves, of their necessities, of their utter emptiness in respect of self-dependency and self-resource, they realise themselves to be poor indeed. "The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich; He bringeth low and lifteth up." Hence it is easy to understand how this humble confession should be accompanied, as here it is, by so confident a persuasion. A gracious experience is the best interpreter of the textual attainment. If the

Spirit is at work within you, showing you what you really are, discovering your exigencies to the discernment of your individual consciousness, He at the same time discovers the means of supplying these exigencies, and the absolute infinitude of resource to provide the whole of that supply. "When men shall say, There is casting down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and He shall save the humble person." *

Let us therefore proceed to the consideration of that which forms the happy turn in the remainder of the text.

II. The Confident Persuasion.

The expression of it is admirably put, and every word tells with an emphasis of its own. "Yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

"*Yet!*" This is evidently emphatic. Notwithstanding my condition, its poverty, in the utter absence of self-resource, and, perhaps, even friendly countenance, its very peculiarity in this respect, there is a rift in the dark cloud; and the star of hope, with its lustrous beam, smiles down upon me from the blue sky overhead. There is neither "if" nor "perhaps" about it. "I shall not die, but live." "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise." Be it that "I am poor and needy" "yet."

"Yet the Lord!" How completely changed the direction of his outlook in the case. Formerly it was

* Job xxii. 29 (various reading).

bent upon himself, "I am poor and needy;" and it might have continued to be still occupied with himself; and his hopes of betterment might have sought to build upon this basis. Be it that no one is my friend or helper, yet I will not lose heart; or, be it that all things have failed me, yet I am not quite bankrupt. There is still something left. I must exert myself. Why should I not succeed to even extricate myself? Never say "Die." "*Nil desperandum.*" But he looked in an altogether different direction, and in one unspeakably better too. "Yet the LORD," the Jehovah of the covenant of peace and promise. Oh, it is so good to fill the mind with thoughts of Him in the covenant-revelation of His gracious character and relations—to shut up oneself within the secret enclosure of all the historical connections of that revelation; and, like the bee in the chalice of the flower-bell, to drink out all the sweetness of it. There is no confidence so sure, so satisfying, as that which builds itself upon the LORD.

"Yet the LORD *thinketh.*" In its human reference and application, this word indicates an exercise of mind, of intellect, of reason. There is attention, consideration, cogitation, deliberation in thought, and thoughtfulness. But with the LORD there is no thinking of such a kind, no study of a case, and no judgment or conclusion as the result of such a study. His thinking is intuitive. It embodies process and result, investigation and conclusion all in one. To say that the LORD thinketh is to say that the LORD knoweth

and doeth the same as if He thought. And who can tell how much this is in Him? "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

"Yet the LORD thinketh *upon me.*" This brings the textual utterance—I would have said—to a climax, were it not that, instead of lifting us up, it has brought us down. "Upon me," the "poor and needy" one, in my sore exigency, in my deep distress. "Behold, God is great, and despiseth not any." He despiseth not me. "The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me." "He thinketh upon me, even me." The confidence of this persuasion is startling. How much it deserves to be thought upon, and sought for too. Perhaps the consideration of it may help us somewhat on the way to its realisation.

1. That *it is a warrantable persuasion* may be easily enough proved. For, if the LORD makes any poor and needy, He is certainly thinking of them, the dispensation itself shows that He is doing so. Besides, is it nothing to the shepherd of a flock that one of his sheep has wandered, though it be even the least and the weakest of a hundred in a fold, will he not leave the ninety and nine, and search after it alone? How is it possible that the covenant Redeemer should ever allow Himself to forget any of His people, however poor, afflicted, needy? What of His gracious relations

in the covenant as Saviour, Friend, Guide, Shepherd, King, and Lord? And what too of His promises, all articulate and specific as they are alike in their address and in their substance? Does the light, reflected from the history of His dispensations, discover either one thing or other to be good for nothing in respect of substantial meaning or actual blessing, except in some indefinite kind of application to the general constituency of mankind as unindividualised in its personal constituents? Or is it so that those of eminence who live, as it were, on the mountain-top, are thought upon to the disregard of those who are away below them, and quite unknown in the dead level of the valley? Where is there anything on the page of Scripture or of history, within the range of observation or of experience, to warrant conclusions, or even to suggest conjectures of such a kind?

John Newton was not far wrong when, grasping the hand of a prosperous Christian merchant belonging to his congregation, who had lost an only son, he said to him as they mingled their tears together, "I was afraid that the LORD might have forgotten you. I am so thankful that He has not." Certainly Mungo Park was right when, having lain down all alone to die in the desert-waste, where he was quite spent with hunger and fatigue, he started to his feet again upon seeing a solitary clump of moss in the sand, smiling back in beauty to the beam of the rising sun, and said to himself, as he set anew on the journey which he then

accomplished with success, "Can the LORD have forgotten me, when He has not forgotten that tiny plant?"

"The daisy on the mountain-sod,
Withdrawn from human view,
Was planted by the hand of God,
The hand that fashioned you.
That flower His care protects, whose call
Did countless worlds create;
By condescending to the small,
He proves that He is great."

Yes, verily, there is not one of us, there is not so much as one anywhere throughout the universe, but is warranted to believe that the eye of the LORD is turned upon him, that the thought of the LORD is concentrated on him as directly as the eye of a well-painted portrait appears to fix itself upon each and every person in the room where it happens to be hung, to say, in short, as in the text, "Yet the LORD thinketh *upon me.*"

2. It must also be very readily admitted that this persuasion is *one which is fraught with unspeakable comfort and consolation.* Suppose we do away with the antithesis of the text. If we substitute the "I" of the first part for "the LORD" of the second, what a change would be effected, and by no means for the better, "I am poor and needy, yet I think upon the LORD." That this way of it would be attended with not a little comfort is no doubt true. It is the way in which the prophet Habakkuk expressed himself in prospect of being stripped of his possessions and left destitute, or

"poor and needy." "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

But how unspeakably better is the Psalmist's way of putting it, "Yet the LORD thinketh upon me." It takes us back to the Divine constitution of the covenant of the rainbow, "And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." You, too, will look upon it, no doubt. But where would be the security of that were it alone? Oh, the sweetness, the perfect deliciousness, to taste of faith in this, "And I will look upon it." "Yet the LORD thinketh upon me," what, though I may be little able to think upon Him, to think much or to think at all, there is a time coming when I shall certainly be unable; but this is quite enough, let the LORD think upon me, and I am content to put myself at His disposal, "Behold, here am I; let Him do to me as seemeth to Him good."

3. Hence, it may be once more observed, that *in every way this is also a most satisfying persuasion.* To say, "Yet the LORD thinketh upon me," may not appear to be saying much. In a sense, it may be saying very little. The utterance occurs in another

Psalm—"I hate vain thoughts," or, rather (for the word "vain" is supplemented), "I hate thoughts,"—that is, thoughts which do not go beyond themselves, which dissipate themselves in waste, never embodying themselves in living form, in substantial action—thoughts which, as our translators have described them not untruly, are indeed "vain," inoperative, unprofitable. But the LORD'S thoughts are never "vain," unproductive, empty; they are invariably sovereign, invincible, almighty.

"Fain would I help, but I cannot," is more than half the agony of human life; the "thinking" is so often the utmost that is possible; and, at all events, there is always a gulf between our thinking and our acting, and sometimes the gulf is very great; whereas, on the part of the LORD, the two are one; there is no transition with Him by intermediate steps or processes of any kind; what He thinks He does; His thoughts are deeds; "Let there be light; and there was light." And how unchangeable withal they are. With us nothing is more mutable, more transient, than thoughts. They rush past us like the shadows on the plain, and we soon forget them. But there is no forgetfulness in Him. From everlasting to everlasting they are like Himself; in truth, they are as Himself—"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And they are certainly most gracious too. "Yet the LORD thinketh upon me." How wonderful! Could any thing be better? "Yet the LORD!" Oh, how great He is!

"Who is like unto Him, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" "Thinketh upon me!" And who is this "Me"? Just me! Let me not substitute another. It would matter little that He thought upon angels, upon saints, if He did not think upon me the sinner. Though all the world else were fed upon the finest of the wheat—I the "poor and needy" might have been left to starve? To the minister who said that it must have been delightful to see the water flowing through the desert from the smitten rock, and the children of Israel running to drink of the welcome stream, the young invalid answered with *naive* simplicity, in the provincial Doric of his mother-tongue—"Ah! yes; but I would have like't a drink mysel." Here the "Me" is *me*; the "poor and needy" me; aye, aye, just me.

> "And what shall I say more?
> I would like to know His thoughts."

And what a revelation of them does this Book of His open to us—"God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This is only one thought of His; and it is a thought how worthy of Him! And what a thought it is also for you! Then, as to other thoughts which as yet may be unrevealed, is it not enough that they are known unto Himself? "I know the thoughts that I

think towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." *

Can you not trust Him in these thoughts of His? Ought you not in faith to give Him credit for them, to give Him glory for them—like the Psalmist himself, when on more than one occasion He sang praises unto Him? "Many, O LORD my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward; they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." † "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me. O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand." ‡ And surely your praises ought never to be alone. Let your prayers precede, accompany, and follow them, as they also did with the Psalmist. I conclude with that petition of his which backs the text; and may we now adopt it —one and all of us—as our own—"Thou art my Help and my Deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God." § Amen.

* Jeremiah xxix. 11.
† Ps. xl. 5.
‡ Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18.
§ Ps. xl. 17.

SERMON VI.

THE PSALM OF GRAVE, SWEET MELODY.

"I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto Thee, O LORD, will I sing."—PSALM ci. 1.

THE royal Psalmist is here supposed by many to vow to the LORD in sacred song that he will faithfully perform his duty in doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. There are, however, perhaps as many who understand him to refer to the varied character of the providential dispensations which had so much chequered his personal history, and to express it as his purpose to praise the LORD for all He had done for him, for what He had done in judgment no less than for what He had done in mercy. I do not mean to judge between these different interpretations. It is plain that our duty to God and our duty to man must go hand in hand. The one cannot be done, and the other left undone. That David had an eye to his relative duties is, I think, obvious from the remainder of the Psalm, in which he tells us how he meant to rule his household and his kingdom; but, at the same time, we may readily admit that he had a regard to what the LORD had done for him as well as to what he himself had to do for man. At all events,

it is this view that I shall adopt as the basis of present discourse,—the view which represents him as singing of the mercy and judgment of the LORD.

An Apostle says, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing Psalms." But the singing of Psalms may be as appropriate in affliction as the offering up of prayer. And indeed, while prayer is the natural expression of the heart in affliction, just as praise is in prosperity, the service of song, the singing of Psalms, is one of the most efficacious means of ministering comfort in times of sorrow. "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." And since then, the harp of David has been often, often, blessed of God for the refreshment of Zion mourners. There is perhaps no portion of Holy Scripture so much made use of in time of trouble as the Psalter; and I believe that its psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are commonly sung on such occasions with more heart, more spiritual elevation, more real gratitude, than in the season of health and prosperity.

> "Often he took the Psalter in his hand,
> And turned to pages blistered long with tears.
> The balm of broken hearts in every land,
> The consolation of a thousand years."

Certainly there is much truth in the remark of a pious commentator, "Whatever our outward condition

is, whether joyful or sorrowful, still we must give glory to God, and sing praises to Him; neither the laughter of a prosperous condition nor the tears of an afflicted condition must put us out of tune for sacred songs." One of the old Jewish paraphrasts has followed this rule in commenting on the text, "If Thou bestowest mercy upon me, or if Thou bringest judgment upon me, before Thee, O LORD, will I sing hymns for all;" and, according to this comment, let us advert to the generally chequered character of the Divine dispensations, and shew how, under all their variety, we ought to cherish and evince a gratefully loving spirit in singing praises to the LORD.

I. THE MINGLED CHARACTER OF THE DIVINE DISPENSATIONS.

Here no doctrinal statements are required. To instance a very few prominent facts with which we are all more or less familiar will be quite enough.

1. It is evidently proper to begin with *the most remarkable providential dispensation in universal history —the work of redemption.* This is the chief of the works of God, and very much because of its marvellous display of Divine mercy and judgment in their distinctive exercise. Look on our Divinely accredited Surety,—God's dear Son incarnate,—made of a woman, made under the law, made a curse for us. Consider His personal history on earth,—so suffering

a history, "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary alone sufficient to make Him the Prince of sufferers. Think of Him "numbered with the transgressors,"—"bearing the iniquity of us all," Divine justice visiting our desert upon Him, exacting from Him the payment of our debt to the uttermost farthing, making Him drink out the cup of trembling to its veriest dregs, sparing nothing, remitting nothing, not one jot or tittle of what was due. Oh! what judgment here. Is not God a God of judgment? Look again at the issue of this judgment on our condition. What did our sins deserve? How could we have ever answered for them? In His vicarious expiation, in His great atonement-sacrifice, our Surety answered for them, paid down the ransom-price of our redemption. He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, that we might have peace with God, the assurance of His love, the sanctification of His Spirit, and at last an abundant entrance, with an ever blessed acceptance, into His glory. And what mercy here. Was there ever the like of it? Mercy in the highest! Mercy to the uttermost! Is not God a God of mercy? How can we be backward to sing the psalms, as our fathers were wont to do, in this connection? "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and

righteousness shall look down from heaven." "Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before Thy face. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy Name shall they rejoice all the day, and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted.".

2. *The general course of providential dispensation towards the world* may be also cited in illustrative evidence of the same characteristic combination. I need hardly say that it is the presence of the people of God as the salt of the earth that preserves it from entire corruption. You may remember how it fared with the old world, when Noah was the only witness for God who remained on it: "And God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me: for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth." From various Scriptural predictions, it would appear to be not unlikely that, at the close of the present dispensation, the world will be every way as godless as before the flood, and that judgment will then proceed without any hindrance in its way. And yet, so long as the people of God are in the world, His dispensations towards it are, on their account, very much mingled and tempered with mercy. How often has occasion been given for saying, "Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a

very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." And how very comforting is the assurance in our Lord's prediction respecting the time of great tribulation: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elects' sake those days shall be shortened."

"Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God," His mercy and His judgment. Even when judgment without mercy is shown towards the world, mercy in the judgment is remembered for the Church. Noah was saved in the ark, when the world was destroyed by the flood. The children of Israel were most graciously delivered at the Red sea, when the armies of Egypt were overwhelmed in its mighty waters. Nor are these exceptional cases. Others may be found on every page of history; and prophecy tells us that we may still look for others to the very last: "Come out of her My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." "The day of vengeance is in Mine heart, and the year of My redeemed is come,"—"vengeance" sudden and decisive as in the hand-breadth of a day; "redemption," all round and full summed as in the complete circle of a year; "goodness and severity," "mercy and judgment;" goodness and mercy to the Church, severity and goodness to the world.

3. Turn to observe the commingling of mercy and judgment in *the Divine action towards the Church.* For it must be frankly confessed that, in both her corporate

constitution and her individual constituency, she is very far from being perfect, as the Lord would have her; and that, on this account, the training of a wholesome discipline is just as necessary to her truest well-being as the benefaction of a gracious, covenant-loving kindness. It is also every way as obvious that such a discipline could not be possibly exercised without a combination of mercy and judgment in wisely ordered administration; and so, in truth, she has always experienced it to be. As in point, take the accepted emblem of her historical condition on earth. "Behold the bush burned with fire!" Here judgment meets our view. "And behold, the bush was not consumed!" Here, on the other hand, is mercy. Or, take her history itself—how all along it has been uniformly distinguished to her highest advantage—never to her disadvantage—by this concurrent and intercurrent dispensation. To begin at the beginning—from Abel downwards, was there ever a period when the experience in question was strange to her in either her membership or her association? It may be often said of those outside her pale: "Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world. They increase in riches. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." But ah! with all the blessing by which she was ever distinguished, what chastisement has been ever measured out to her as well? When needed, the rod has never been withheld, or the purifying fire left unkindled.

"Judgment must begin at the house of God." "Begin at My sanctuary." "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." These are sayings of God which have been as faithfully verified in her experience as any of His promises of blessing. Both the one and the other have been always fulfilled to her according to the wisdom of His grace, with well-timed seasonableness; and hence her history is as much marked as any other—perhaps more than any other—by the varied goodness and severity of His providence in its ever-righteous administration.

4. Let us trace this character *in the lines of our household and individual history.* What family has not to tell of the alternate sunshine and shower of its April vicissitudes—its mercies and its trials—births, marriages, deaths, and burials—often in association with one another, and at least in succession to one another—and this in some cases, not on rare occasions, but more or less for years together? Certainly, when the one is considered with the other, as it is Divinely meant to be, and when both are known to come from Him—"What! shall we receive good at the hand of the LORD, and shall we not receive evil? shall we not honour Him in both?" Yes. I think I am right to say that the first line of all our family songs may be, as in this householder's psalm—"I will sing of mercy and judgment."

The same character of vicissitude will meet us at

many a turn, or—shall I not say?—at every turn of our personal career. It would be a very strange history which was not so chequered. I venture to say that it could not be the history of a saint. At all events, if you read the history of Bible saints—of Job, Jacob, David, and all the rest—you will find change—change—on every leaf—on every page—now day, now night—now summer, now winter—ups and downs—smiles and frowns—storms and calms—alternation upon alternation in an almost perpetual round. This is particularly observable in the spiritual sphere. Now you hear David singing—"Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes." Again, you hear him crying—"LORD, where are Thy former loving-kindnesses?" And so the Apostle Paul. Hear him when he says—"I delight in the law of God after the inward man." What enjoyment his! How he sings of mercy, as well he may! Ah! but there is a crook in his lot, a cross in his path, a cloud in his sky. Bitter is mingled with the sweet. Judgment accompanies the mercy. "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Still, in such a case, at even its very worst, he is not without everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Nor are these by any means exceptional experiences. I believe

there is hardly an exercised saint on earth who is a stranger to them. At least, I should not like to be the saint who knows nothing of them. I am very much persuaded that he must be of a most unamiable kind—very defective in the exercise of the higher Christian graces, and altogether void of such as Christian tenderness and Christian sympathy, and, I had almost said, of Christian love. But this brings us to advert to the purpose of these alternations or vicissitudes.

II. The Reasons for Praise under all the Variety of Providence.

It is plain that we could not well sing to the Lord without some knowledge of these reasons. We must, no doubt, be content to remain in ignorance of the Why and Wherefore of His procedure in much that He is pleased to do, and we ought not on that account to come short in our devoutly adoring worship of Him; but, assuredly, the burden of our songs, as well as the music of them, must largely depend on the extent, or at least the character, of our intelligence. At present I shall therefore touch upon some of the things which plainly call upon us to sing to the Lord for the mercy and the judgment in the dispensations to which our attention has been directed.

1. *The discovery made by the variety in question of the Divine character* is of itself enough to make us

sing to the LORD with delighted heartiness. "Who can by searching find out God?" Were it not for His own revelation of Himself, He would certainly be, as they named Him in old Athens, or in still older Egypt, "The I am which was, which is, and which shall be; and no mortal hath ever lifted up the veil." And had that revelation been but partial, or had it exhibited but a profile of Him,—only one side of His perfection, only one aspect of His character,—we could have hardly known Him any better; at least our knowledge of Him must have been most imperfect, and in its moral influence it might have led us into very serious, if not fatal, error.

Suppose, for instance, we had known Him on His mercy side alone—as a God with whom there is no vengeance, and who never dispenses justice from a throne of righteousness—or on His judgment side alone—as a God with whom there is no salvation, and who, therefore, never dispenses mercy from a throne of grace—what, in at least the present state, would have been the practical effect upon all of us? Such a God —a God all mercy, or a God all judgment—there is not; and even had there been, He would have been to us as good as none. Of a surety we must know God even as He is, if we can at all be said to know Him; we must know Him in the wholeness of His character, or in His majesty, holiness, justice, mercy, love, and goodness, all together. Hence it is that the revelation afforded in the moral administration of His mercy and

His judgment is so satisfyingly welcome. The LORD is known by the judgment which He executeth, as well as by the mercy which He dispenseth. Upon beholding His redemption work on the bright side of the cloud-symbol of His presence at the Red Sea, we sing with Israel, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy;" and again, upon passing over to the dark side of the cloud-symbol, and beholding His judgment-work in the destruction of the Egyptian host, "Who is a God like unto Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" "Behold," I say again, "the goodness and severity of God"—not the one alone, or the other alone, but both—both in nature, both in providence, both in Scripture, both in grace. "Behold and wonder." Behold and worship. This God—the God which showeth mercy and worketh loving-kindness, the God with whom we have to do—"this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our Guide even unto death."

2. *The disciplinary development of our own moral and religious character* thereby promoted. This effect may be observed in many things; a few of them may be instanced.

(1.) *There is the way in which such dispensations operate in subduing our corruptions.* Did we enjoy unmingled prosperity, it would be sure to dry up the sap and marrow of religion in us. It is most painful

to read that, after Hezekiah had fifteen years added to his life, "he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up, therefore wrath was upon him." On the other hand, were we to be visited by continual adversity, it would just as certainly break down our spirit; and alas for religion then! You may remember that, when Moses told the children of Israel in Egypt of their approaching deliverance, "they hearkened not to him for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage," such was the influence upon them of their long affliction. Hence the various dispensations in question—not all light, lest we be exalted above measure with the abundance of the revelation; not all darkness, lest our feet stumble upon stumbling stones, and we fall, so that we cannot rise again; not all honey, lest with full soul we loathe the honeycomb; not all gall, lest we complain in the bitterness of our soul; not all mercy, lest our heart be lifted up, and we forget the LORD; not all judgment, lest we curse the day of our birth, lest we even curse God and die—but light and darkness, honey and gall, mercy and judgment, sometimes the one, and sometimes the other, just as each is needed, and always when it is needed. "Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name; they called upon the LORD, and He answered them; He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar; they kept His testimonies and the ordinance that He gave them. Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God, Thou

wast a God that forgavest them." * Really, could there be anything better than prayers answered and sins forgiven? What a mercy. Yes; but in the enjoyment of it there must be penitence, contrition, brokenness of heart; humbleness of mind; and therefore there is judgment with the mercy. "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance on their inventions." "Vengeance on their inventions!" Do bless God for that. The judgment in such a case is quite as gracious, or at least as sanctifying, as the mercy.

(2.) *There is also the way in which the same thing operates in exercising our graces.* I understand seafaring men to say that, when the wind blows directly in the course that a ship is going, it does not make the vessel go so fast as when the wind is blowing from a side-direction, because the sails are so arranged that, in the case of a direct wind, only some of them are filled by it, whereas a side-wind fills them all, and speeds the vessel in proportion.† Now, when the LORD sends a full continuous gale of mercy, it fills but some of our sails, it exercises but some of our graces; whereas, when He sends a side-wind, so to speak, a dispensation which may seem to be for us at one time and against us at another, or perhaps as much against us as for us, and for us as much as against us; ah! then He fills all our sails, exercises all our graces, and we are

* Ps. xcix. 6, 7, 8.

† Dr Owen's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 80 (Goold's Edition).

sent forward all the more freely and speedily to our desired haven.

Hence, as it has been put in a way still more appropriately expressive, a song like that of Habakkuk upon Shigionoth (that is, upon a tune of a varied order and expression, having both the mirthful and the mournful in it, the major and the minor, as may be required in answerableness to difficulty and deliverance, to storm and calm, to war and peace), has certainly most music in it, the largest amount of melody. At all events, I concur with the Puritan who said, "That instrument will make no music that hath only some strings in tune. If, when God strikes with mercy upon joy and gladness, we answer pleasantly; but, when He touches with judgment upon that of sorrow and humiliation, we suit it not, we are but broken instruments that make no melody to God. A well-tuned heart has all its strings, all its affections, ready to answer every touch of God's finger, whether in one way or another. Certainly all the graces of the Spirit are best exercised by him who has to sing of mercy and judgment, and to the LORD of both.

(3.) *The dispensation of mercy and judgment operates in the way of leading us to exercise a more abiding dependence upon the* LORD *Himself.* It is a sad complaint which He makes through the prophet of Ephraim or Israel: "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was

exalted; therefore have they forgotten Me." * On the other hand, the complaint which many in affliction and adversity make of Him is quite as sad: "Will the LORD cast off for ever! And will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" † Plainly it is most considerate and gracious of Him, and like the loving Father that He is, so to order His providence, laying one thing against another; sometimes caressing, sometimes chastening, neither always caressing, nor always chastening, that He may keep the hearts of His own, as had been said, "in an even balance, or in a continual dependence upon Himself, neither wanton through mercy, nor cast down by judgment."

(4.) *This vicissitude of dispensation still further operates in the way of preparing us for a condition of unmingled enjoyment in a better world.* This vicissitude is, in fact, preparing all men for their own place, whether heaven or hell. Just as the same wind will blow different vessels in contrary directions according as their sails are set, so the self-same mercy and judgment, which unite to sanctify an heir of heaven, will only harden and the more deprave an heir of hell. ‡

Anyhow, "we know that all things work together

* Hosea xiii. 6. † Ps. lxxvii. 7, 8, 9.
‡ *See* Owen, *ut supra.*

for good to them that love God, who are the called according to His purpose." For the present they may be often tempted to say with Jacob, in reference to the changes or alternations in their lot, "All these things are against me;" but again when, instead of sense, they bring faith to sit in judgment, they are as ready to say and also to sing with David: "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." This they shall certainly sing in the heavenly glory—

> "When Faith shall grow a man, and Thought a child,
> And that in us which thinks with that which feels
> Shall everlastingly be reconciled,
> And that which questioneth with that which kneels."

Yes, when their trials are all ended, and their mercies are all perfected, they shall be ever with the LORD, and always in good case to sing praise to Him for both the one and the other, for the sanctified issues of both, as themselves "made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity."

Now then, I trust that this meditation may be helpful in the way of at least warning you to be ready for whatever vicissitude, whether of mercy or of judgment, may be sent upon you during the days to come. Some of you might have preferred to hear of a brighter, or an easier future as before you; and not a few might have been prepared to gratify you in this regard. There is no lack of railroad contractors who can plan

and engineer a line right away to heaven without cuttings, or tunnels, or even an incline upon the route; and by which, if you just take out your ticket at the earth-end of the terminus, you may at once go off first-class, and, after a most enjoyable journey in a compartment of the carriage furnished with every comfort, arrive in good time quite safe and ever so well, to "be ever with the Lord." Woe's me for the shareholders of those railway-bubbles when they burst!

Look for vicissitude, change, mercy and judgment, love and righteousness, in the Divine dealings with you. If it is always alike with you, always daylight, always sunshine, I fear for you. Here is an instructive text which may make many tremble. They may not like to think of it, but they really ought: "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." * No changes! A year without the seasons, all summer, or all winter, where in such a case were the harvest? I do pity the Christian who has no winter in his experience to clean the soil of his heart from the grubs and the rank undergrowth of weeds by which, in summer and autumn heat, it is so apt to be overrun. What a poor Christian he must be. Think of the reasons why mercy and judgment should both enter into the history of your life-experience, and you will not be slow to "hang songs like hawthorn" from even the sharpest trials. Yes, and as you sing to the LORD these songs to music, of which mercy forms the melody

* Psalm lv. 19.

and judgment the harmony, may you be made to perceive and realize that mercy moulds, orders, and governs judgment, or, should I not rather say with an apostle? "rejoices against judgment." That it does so in the case of every true Christian is certain. I would to God that you were a Christian of such a stamp, by at once becoming Christ's in faith, and love, and holiness. Then would you sing, as we also would together.

"I've found a joy in sorrow,
A secret balm for pain,
A beautiful to-morrow
Of sunshine after rain.

"I've found a branch of healing
Near every bitter spring,
A whispered promise stealing
On every broken string.

"I've found a glad Hosanna
For every woe and wail,
A handful of sweet manna
When grapes from Eschol fail.

"I've found a Rock of ages
When desert-wells are dry;
And after many stages
I've found an Elim nigh,—

"An Elim with its coolness,
Its fountain and its shade,
A blessing in its fulness
When buds of promise fade.

"O'er tears of soft contrition
I've seen a rainbow bright,
A glory and fruition
So near, yet out of sight.

"My Saviour, Thee possessing,
I have the joy, the balm,
The healing and the blessing,
The sunshine and the Psalm,

"The promise for the fearful,
The Elim for the faint,
The rainbow for the tearful,
The glory for the saint." Amen.

SERMON VII.

THE ABOUNDING PRAYER.

"Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation; That I may see the good of Thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance."—PSALM cvi. 4, 5.

IT is quite evident that, whatever the occasion on which this psalm was written, the Psalmist was deeply impressed with a sense of the Divine goodness to Israel, and that he was most anxious to obtain a hearty national concurrence with himself in public thanksgiving. At the same time, it is quite as evident that his attention was not exclusively occupied with the duty of public thanksgiving. There was his own personal interest in the matter, about which he was not less concerned. For, what of the Divine goodness to Israel if he had no part in it, if he had no saving interest in that goodness? Hence it is that he here breaks in so abruptly—one might say, almost intrusively—upon the public thanksgiving with the heart-heaved outbreathing of the text. This outbreathing, which, in devotional prayerful expression, is one of the most spiritual and sublime in Holy Scripture, is made up of two immediate and three ulterior requests, each

increasing in intensity according to the order of its succession, and in their combination forming a specimen of what, in point of style, is called the climax,—the expression of thought being so arranged as to form an upward gradation in each successive statement like the ascending series of notes in the music scale, and it is a mode of speech which is often studied and admired in rhetoric. But in the text there is much more than rhetoric, or, if you will have it so, it is a gracious, a holy rhetoric, from which we may learn not a little as to the way in which our prayers should be preferred to the Throne of grace, with ever-enlarging desires and expectations.

I. The Immediate Requests.

Both of these requests are singularly great and good; only, according to the ascending gradient of the climax, the second notably transcends the first.

1. The first solicits *a specially loving Divine remembrance.* "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people."

"*The favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people!*" There is a favour borne by the Lord towards all mankind in common with the other creatures of His hand. "The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works." * There is also a favour of a more special kind borne by Him towards those whom

* Psalm cxlv. 9.

He has gathered together into the visible fellowship of church-communion. On them He bestows more than temporal blessings. They are within the bond of the covenant of promise. They have Sabbaths and sanctuaries, the Scriptures and the sacraments. The light of the glorious Gospel shines around them. Christ in all His fulness is preached to them. The Spirit in His awakening operations strives with them. God in all the riches of His grace beseeches them to be reconciled. Now David was blessed with all this favour, with that which is common and with that which is more special, to no small degree. He had temporal blessings bestowed upon him in abundance. The LORD took him "from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over His people, over Israel," and gave him a monarch's state and a monarch's revenue to live upon. He had also conferred on him important spiritual privileges. He was of the stock of Israel, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, and lived in a day when the worship of God and the ordinances of Divine appointment were observed in integrity and purity. Still he knew that general providential mercy and visible church privilege would profit him but little, if he had nothing more, if he had not over and above a personal interest in a much more special favour, in the LORD'S covenant-favour towards His own elect; and hence it was his earnest prayer, his constant prayer, to be remembered with this favour.

"*Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou*

bearest unto Thy people." David, it is evident, believed in the fact of election. He may not, at this present, have been comfortably persuaded of his own election. The terms of the petition would appear to indicate a mind in some doubt about it. But the fact itself was not uncertain to him. It is indeed difficult to understand how any awakened sinner, and still more, how any veritable saint, can impugn it. It may do very well to declaim against it in a system of divinity, or on the arena of theological discussion; but it is quite another matter to disavow it on one's knees. The devotion which proceeds upon such a disavowal, must be very strange. Does it deserve to be called devotion? Surely the man who has been denuded of everything like self-resource, the man who has been broken down and brought to nothing, the man who has been made to see that he is a very bankrupt and beggar before God, owing ten thousand talents, and having nothing to pay, surely this man will admit that, if the LORD help him not, he cannot help himself, and that, as his poor parishioner in Olney is reported by John Newton to have said, "if the LORD has not chosen him from all eternity, He will never discover any good about him in time, as a reason why He should choose him then." And yet the fact of election should never keep a sinner from the Throne of grace. It did not keep David from it. It had the precisely opposite effect. It brought him to it. Be it that the multitude and magnitude of his sins may have seemed to place him

beyond the reach of mercy. Be it that the justice and holiness of God may have appeared to call for his condemnation. What should he do on this account? Conclude himself not only a hell-deserving but also a hell-doomed sinner? Nothing of the kind. There is hope in Israel for him, hope in that gracious, sovereign election which is so much misrepresented and maligned in the world, and even in the Church.

The LORD has a people in the world peculiarly His own, a people "chosen" by Himself, and "formed" by Himself to show forth His praise. But this people were originally and naturally sinners, as David was himself. The sovereign, electing favour of the LORD pitched upon them as sinners, not as saints. It viewed them fallen, ruined, self-destroyed; and even thus it chose them to salvation. Why then may not electing love be fixed on you, on me? What though we be defiled by sin and oppressed with guilt? The whole elect were once the same. It was grace, and grace alone, that made them what they are. The favour of the LORD was extended to them, when it was in every way unmerited, when His judgment was in every way deserved. And have we not in this an incentive to pray, and also an encouragement to hope, that the same favour may be shewn to us? Had it been conditional favour, favour induced by some measure or manner of goodness when found in men, it might have been presumptuous so to pray, and so to hope; but there is no presumption in the one thing or the other,

and therefore our way is clear: let no one dash our hopes, let no one forbid our prayer; we may always pray as sinners, even although we should never be able to pray as saints.

Brethren, have you had a spiritually enlightened sight of your state and character by nature? Do you deprecate the Divine displeasure as the greatest and worst of evils? Are you persuaded that to enjoy the favour and friendship of the LORD is the sum and substance of spiritual life, the health and happiness of the soul? Then entreat His favour with your whole heart. You say that you deserve it not. But who of this sinful race ever did deserve it? Not any now in heaven. Not any yet on earth. All the favoured of the LORD have been freely favoured. And hence, so far from there being anything to hinder, there is everything to encourage you to lay yourselves down, like beggars, at the LORD'S door, and like David here, to urge this beggar's prayer, "Remember me, O LORD." Observe the mendicant on the highway. With what pathos he tells his tale. With what pertinacity he implores an alms. Nor does he plead in vain. His appeals do not come to nothing. The benevolent passer-by gives way to the impulses of his generous nature, and kindly relieves the poor man's wants. Humble, earnest, importunate suppliants will not come off less happily with the LORD. This prayer, and that of the thief on the cross, how like to one another! And what was the answer to his prayer? Was there

ever an answer like it? "LORD, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." * Oh, the encouragement to pray as here. "For this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." †

2. The second request solicits *a graciously saving Divine visit.* "O visit me with Thy salvation." "Thy salvation!" There are various shades of meaning belonging to the word "salvation" as used in Scripture. Sometimes its reference is future; it denotes the consummation of redemption in a state of glory, the beatific vision in "the full enjoying of God to all eternity." At other times its reference is proximate; it denotes the application of redemption in the present life; the act of conversion and the process of sanctification, with all the accompanying benefits of pardon, and hope, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. In the present instance, its reference, while specific enough in so far that it evidently bears upon the present, is as evidently comprehensive of the future; it denotes salvation in its entireness, salvation beginning on earth, in deliverance from the condemnation and contamination of sin, and terminating in the beatitudes of a glorified perfection in heaven, amid the endless praises of eternity.

* Luke xxiii. 42, 43. † 1 John v. 14, 15.

Now, salvation in this conception of it, in every conception of it, is of the LORD. "Thy salvation," the Psalmist calls it. A salvation wrought out by human effort—whether his own or another's effort—would not have answered to his need, would not have delivered him in any way from his sinful experiences and guilty apprehensions. This is what can be accomplished by a Divine salvation only. Nothing else can cancel the guilt of sin. Nothing else can destroy the power of sin. Everything that is human is here without effect. Everything that is earthly is good for nothing. Everything that is not Divine is worse than nothing. A salvation devised by the LORD, revealed by the LORD, bestowed by the LORD, a salvation provided by His wisdom, attested by His faithfulness, and ratified in its application by the gracious operation of His spirit, is the only salvation that can meet the case. And it does meet the case. How it pacifies the conscience. How it purifies the heart. How it gladdens life. How it sweetens death. How it communicates a happy immortality beyond the grave. The things included in salvation, and which accompany salvation, comprise all things that pertain to grace, and godliness, and glory; and what more is wanted for time or for eternity?

"*O visit me with Thy salvation!*" David, it is evident, did not expect to enjoy salvation without the LORD. He might read of it in the promise, and He might think of it in the prospect, but it would remain alike in the promise and in the prospect, if the LORD did not

give it to him in possession, if the LORD did not come and reveal Himself as bringing it home by the presence and the power of His Holy Spirit. What multitudes are of a different mind! They are content to live on from year to year,—from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to decrepitude,—without the salvation of the LORD, because without communion with Him. Perhaps they would like to have it when they die; yes, if He would let them have it without Himself; but, at all events, they can afford, while living, to want both Him and it together. "What will they do when God riseth up and when he visiteth," for there is a Divine visitation which they must encounter; only there is no salvation with it, "when He visiteth, what shall they answer Him?" *

Brethren, we learn from the word of the LORD that we have ground to hope in Him for His salvation; but what although, if we have not the hope itself? We know that this hope is only to be realised in the Divine visitation with saving power and love and mercy to the heart. The love-remembrance that is far away will never do. It is pleasing, gladdening, to be assured of the affectionate remembrances of a dear relation in a distant land; but the ocean wide and the seas between, how they chill our gladness! Oh, that the beloved one were home again! *That* would be a blithesome day when he once more crossed our threshold with numerous gifts and blessings, and

* Job xxxi. 14.

we were never more to part. So here. The Divine remembrance, however loving, is not enough. Oh, for a Divine visit, a gracious visit. Come, LORD, and by Thine own finger, write upon my heart the assurance of Thy love. Come, LORD, and by Thine own Spirit witness with my spirit that I am Thy adopted child. Come, LORD, and by Thine own counsel, guide me while I live; and afterwards by Thine own hand receive me, when I die, into everlasting habitations. "O LORD, make haste to help me." "O visit me with Thy salvation." Doubtless this prayer was graciously answered to the Psalmist. We know that it was literally answered to the Church when "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and the first of New Testament songs were sung: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David." * And how should we be so slow of heart to believe in a gracious answer now? "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God." †

II. THE ULTERIOR REQUESTS.

These requests are not less expressive of the expectations of the Psalmist. He had no idea of praying for blessings which, when bestowed, would leave him in the same moral and spiritual condition that he

* Luke i. 78, 79. † John xi. 40.

was in before. He believed that blessedness on his part would be the effect of benefaction on the LORD's part. And how much may suppliants thus learn from Him. Why should they go on, as if they were never the better, and never to be the better, of their praying? "Remember me, O LORD; O visit me, that I may see; that I may rejoice; that I may glory."

The upward gradation of the climax is even more obvious here than in the former part of the prayer; and beginning at what may be viewed as the lowest round of the ladder at this stage, I shall climb up step by step to the top.

1. There is *the consciousness of gracious well-being.* "That I may see the good of Thy chosen."

"*Thy chosen!*" Here again is the election. The people of the LORD are His chosen, His elect; and they are so, not because they have chosen Him, at least in the first instance, but because He has chosen them. Some are anxious to make out that this is not an eternal election. But if it is a Divine election, how can it be other than eternal? Election in time: yes, it is a blessed thing. That the LORD should graciously choose or elect a sinner to eternal life, no matter when,—it is impossible to tell or to conceive how much He should be praised for it. But election in eternity; oh! it is so much more blessed. That the Divine election in time should be the outcome, not of an extemporaneous purpose, but of an eternal purpose,—is not this the Godlike way of it? It

is, at all events, the Bible way of it, incomparably the best way of it. For the LORD to have chosen us, and the like of us, not for the first time to-day or yesterday, or when we came to such an age, or even so far back as when we were born, but in ages past,—from before the foundation of the world,—from all eternity,—there is, in truth, no speaking of such a thing; it quite brings us to a stand-still in speechless admiration, in speechless adoration.

"*The good of Thy chosen!*" Rare, transcendent, priceless good indeed this is. It embraces a conscience purged and pacified, a sense of Divine pardon, an assurance of Divine love, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, the full assurance of understanding, the full assurance of faith, the full assurance of hope, the comfort of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Spirit, Divine communion with the fulness of its blessing. And who can tell how good all this, good which in its issue turns evil into good,—real, substantial, eternal good.

"*That I may see the good of Thy chosen.*" See it; but how? A mendicant may look over the hedge of a baronial policy, and, contemplating the magnificence of the manor, may vainly wish that it were all his own; a stranger visiting this metropolis may be admitted to view the regalia of our ancient monarchy in the castle, but the iron cage within which they are inclosed hinders him from taking any thing away; "many" shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and

all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and be themselves thrust out." A sight of such a kind would have never satisfied the Psalmist in the matter of this good. To see it with the eye of speculative inquiry as a theorist may do, or with the eye of prophetical perspicacity as a seer might do;—no, this would never satisfy. He desired to see it as the elect, the "chosen" do, with the eye of a conscious faith, of a spiritually illumined soul; to see it so as to be sustained, stimulated, rejoiced, and beatified by it; to see it as made over to himself, so that it might become his own, just as when the owner of an estate looks over it and says, "This farm, that goodly mansion, those spacious parks, the domain all round, the whole is mine." Such was the sight which he desired, the only sight which is ever satisfying. "There be many that say—Who will shew us any good?" "Any good" will serve their turn. And they will go anywhere to get it. They will be thankful to any one who will even shew it to them, or take them where they may but see it. "O ye sons of men, how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?" Come hither. Behold this lowly suppliant before the mercy-seat. Learn from him what good is worth the having, and also how and where it is to be obtained. "LORD, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance." Yes, and then,—oh! the happy consciousness of a gracious well-being,—a well-being the like of which is never known on earth in the midst of all the wealth and pleasure it

affords to even its most successful votaries. "Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." *

2. There is *the experience of spiritual joy.* "That I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation." This is the next step in the ladder. "Thy chosen." "Thy nation." "The good of Thy chosen." "The gladness of Thy nation." "That I may see the good of Thy chosen." "That I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation."

"*Thy nation.*" Here is another name for the people of the LORD—also, like the last, significant—quite as full of precious meaning. For, while the last has reference to the purpose of grace in eternity, this has reference to the dispensation of grace in time. "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." They form "a kingdom, not of this world," "an holy nation," a Divine society with laws from heaven, and the LORD Himself for their Lord and King. They are "a peculiar people," as in other things, so in this, that, however diversified by social distinction, or separated by geographical partition, they are a people united in name and nature, in principle and pursuit, under the immediate government of heaven. Whatever earthly power may claim their homage and obtain it, they are at the same time subject to another power, the sovereign supremacy of the King of kings. They are under the protection of

* Psalm iv. 7.

His law. The broad shield of His favour is around them, and He makes "all things work together for their good." He "daily loadeth them with benefits." He "blesseth them with all spiritual blessings in Christ." He dwelleth in them and walketh with them. They are His people. He is their God. "Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the LORD."

The gladness of Thy nation. For when so much "good" is theirs, they have reason to be "glad." It is indeed a most warrantable gladness theirs. It is a gladness which the Holy Spirit imparts, and it is often experienced and manifested in times of deepest trial. It is a gladness altogether spiritual, refined from the base alloy of earthly-mindedness, arising not from the abundance of corn and wine, but from the believing persuasion of the favour of the LORD, and a personal interest in His salvation. Are a long subjugated and much oppressed people glad when their bands are loosed, when their enemies are scattered, when the tidings pass on as with electric speed from man to man, and from place to place,—"The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers; the oppressors are consumed out of the land;" and when once more they stand up in the might and majesty of freedom. Oh! how can the people of the LORD be otherwise than glad, when they have been set at liberty by an act of glorious emancipation from the most accursed bondage, when, as no longer subject to Satan's

sway, they are now the LORD's freemen, the LORD's nation, when the LORD is their Defence, and the Holy One of Israel is their King? "Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee? O people saved by the LORD, the Shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency."

"*That I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation.*" Not see it merely, but share it too in a way answerable to its high and holy character, singing with grace in my heart to the LORD in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. Possibly the Psalmist was not at present realising this gladness in any good and gracious measure. He may have been straitened in spirit, shut up as it were in gloom, his soul beclouded with doubts and fears, no out-going of sanctified affection, no forth-putting of heavenward expectation; and in such a case, no wonder how intense his prayer. Oh! it is gladsome to know that the LORD has a nation, and that they are a gladsome nation; but still more gladsome by far it is to know that we are of this nation, and warranted to join in its holy mirth. To read of this gladness in the Bible, or in the history of the saints, ought never to be thought enough. The experience of it for himself and in himself, the realisation of it here on earth as an Eshcol-cluster from the bliss of heaven, is what David prayed for, and what we too should pray for, till, like him also, we have to say, "Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope." "Thou wilt shew me the path of

life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." *

3. There is *the exultation of holy triumph.* "That I may glory with Thine inheritance." We are now at the top of the ladder. Step by step we have here climbed to its highest round. "Thy chosen." "Thy nation." "Thine inheritance." "The good of Thy chosen." "The gladness of Thy nation." "The glorying of Thine inheritance." "That I may see the good of Thy chosen." "That I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation." "That I may glory with Thine inheritance."

"*Thine inheritance.*" Here is yet another name for the people of the LORD, more blessed than the last, more blessed than the first. For, while the last refers to the present, and the first to the past, this goes forward to the future, and goes forward in a way so good, so gracious, that it is impossible to say how much is in it. We know that the people of the LORD are heirs, "heirs of God;" and that, as such, it doth not yet appear what they shall be; for, as Moses said in the Deuteronomy to Israel, they are not as yet come to the rest, and to the inheritance which the LORD their God giveth them. Oh! this inheritance; the LORD Himself; or, to quote the magnificent words of the Shorter Catechism, "the full enjoying of God to all eternity;" as we have it again from Moses concerning the tribe of Levi, "The LORD God of Israel is their

* Psalm xvi. 9, 11.

inheritance, as He said unto them." And how, with the future of this inheritance in view, should we turn our back upon both the present and the past, and with pilgrim staff in hand hie us on to the eternal glory.

But it is something else that is indicated by the name here. It is not that He is their inheritance. It is that they are His inheritance. And so, what then? Shall He come short of His inheritance? The heirs of an earthly inheritance are but heirs apparent or heirs presumptive, and either in one way or in another they may be disappointed of the inheritance after all. But not so here. I believe in the sovereign election of sinners. I believe no less in the gracious perseverance of saints. The LORD is their inheritance, and they are His inheritance; and there can be no shortcoming of the mutual inheritance on either His part or theirs. And so again, what then? If they are waiting for their inheritance, is He not waiting too for His? If we cannot tell how much they will find in Him, can we tell how much He will find in them? We say that if they get no better from Him in the future than they get from Him in the present, they may be ashamed of Him. And shall we not say, that if He gets no better from them in the future than He gets from them in the present, He too may be ashamed of them? It is not here that He is all in all to them. It is not here that they are all in all to Him. On earth there is not the fulness of His promises, nor is there the fulness of their praises. Nothing but imperfection

here. In heaven—but we must hold our peace when we look forward to the glory which shall be revealed in Him, and which shall also be revealed in us. Let rhetoric speak its best; it is but the babbling of a fool on such a subject. It is when the tongue sticks to the roof of the mouth, and oratory is dumb, that, in the silence, faith may bathe itself in the blessed hope that we are nearest to "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints," that which is meant by this last name, best name, "Thine inheritance."

"*That I may glory* with Thine inheritance." Glory! How Glory? Can there be any glorying that is good? Certainly there is much glorying that is evil. All self-glorying. But the "chosen," the "nation," the "inheritance" of the LORD do not glory in themselves. They may have as much to glory in as any man can have; they may have more, but they cannot glory before God. They know that no flesh should glory in His presence. They know that in themselves, or in their flesh, dwelleth no good thing, and that, therefore, it becomes to have their mouth in the dust, and to be covered with the mantle of confusion. And yet it is not wrong in them to glory; it is quite right in them to glory—to glory in the LORD, to glory with His inheritance.

What is it to glory with His inheritance in the LORD? It is to exalt Him highest in our affection and esteem. We do not glory in common things, but in what is esteemed of superior excellence and worth.

It is to claim Him as our own and only Lord. We do not glory in that which does not belong to us, or in which we have no concern. It is to confess Him before men. We make known to others what we glory in. We make it our boast and song before them. It is to place on Him the crown of our salvation; to take it from off our own head, and to put it upon His; to give all the glory of it from first to last to Him to whom it all belongs. It is to "hallelujah" in everything belonging to Him and connected with Him; to hallelujah in His Name; to hallelujah in His love; to hallelujah in His righteousness; to hallelujah in the majesty of His law; in the salvation of His gospel; in the blessing of His reign. This is what David desired to do when he desired to glory with the LORD'S inheritance. And this, too, is the only glorying which you may desire to join in—to be stripped of all vain-glorying; to be stripped of all self-glorying; to glory in the LORD. "Thus saith the LORD: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; neither let the mighty man glory in his might: let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me." "He that glorieth, let him glory in the LORD."

Are there any of you who have already prayed this prayer, and obtained an answer to it? Let me tell you that all you have obtained, however much you may regard it, is very little compared with what is to be yet obtained. Let your vessel be brimful. Let your

cup run over. Let it even be that you are the length of him who cried, "Lord, stay Thine hand; it is enough." Still you have nothing more than what is satisfying for the present. You have no stock in hand, no reserve in store. You are always requiring the renewal of mercy upon mercy, every day and all your days needing fresh supplies of grace, repeated and enlarged communications out of the fulness that is in Christ. And then, when you look forward to eternity, Oh, what an ocean of good is there! You may know something of salvation begun, and in progress too; but what is that to salvation in its completion? You may rejoice in the favour and fellowship of the LORD on earth; but to rejoice in the favour and fellowship of the LORD in heaven, what do you know of that? Say, are you beyond the text? Can you get beyond it? Be it that you stand on the Pisgah summit of Divine communion, the sight of "that good land that is beyond Jordan" ought to keep you at it all the more. How can you be ever done with it?

Or, are there any of you present in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling—afraid that you are not converted persons, that you have no interest in the well-ordered covenant; that you have no right to claim the Lord as yours, and not knowing very well what to do—whether to give up or not; whether to pray on or not. Tell me are you persuaded that you are undone, if the LORD does not remember you—for ever lost, if He does not visit you with His salvation?

Are you convinced that you can do nothing to save yourself, that you are head over ears in debt to Him who made you, and at the same time bankrupt, beggared, altogether without righteousness and strength? And what is the effect of this conviction? Are you lying in the debtors' jail? Are you chained down in the dark dungeon? Is there no ray of light shining through the iron grating of your prison cell? And are you at peace in this condition? No; no. You so wish deliverance. You so long for light. You are eager to be anything and anywhere, if only the LORD would loose your bonds and set you free. So then you are on the way to light and liberty, or they are on the way to you? Are your prayers unanswered? Pray on. Is your seeking fruitless? Seek on. Is your knocking vain? Knock on. "I being in the way." He had a happy answer who could say that. It is good to be in the way. "He that believeth shall not make haste." Against hope believe in hope; and as in the case of Abraham, after all the hopes of nature had withered and decayed—"Jehovah-Jireh." "In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen."

Or, are there any, strangers to grace and godliness, alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, having no hope, and without hope in the world? I would address you in the words of Peter to Simon Magus, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God." And if you are at any loss how or for what to pray, appropriate the text. You could not do better.

It will suit you well. It suits all persons, of all characters, of all countries, of all ages; and when prayed in faith or in connection with the merit of the slain Lamb, it cannot be prayed in vain. He who listened to it or to a prayer which began like it when He was dying on the cross, will not refuse to hear it again when He is now reigning on the throne. Possibly an answer from Him may not come soon; it may appear to be withheld, to be as it were refused in even reproachful terms, as when it was once said to a suppliant, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs;" but still like that suppliant, turn even the repulse into an argument for blessing, "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the Master's table." For your life's sake, for your soul's sake, cry mightily to Him, and take no naysay off His hand. Stir up yourselves to take hold of Him that He may be at peace with you, and you at peace with Him. Cling to Him, as when Jacob hung on the angel's neck, and said with agonized eagerness, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me;" and "the LORD shall count when He writeth up the people" that your name is on record among the living in Jerusalem, whose names are in the book of life. Hallelujah.

SERMON VIII.

THE APPLE TREE OF THE EAST.

"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."—SONG OF SOLOMON, ii. 3.

IN the allegorical representation of this book, the LORD is depicted as the Husband or Bridegroom of the church, which, on the other hand, is symbolized in harmony as His Spouse or Bride. This hieroglyph, as a not uncommon one in Scripture, very aptly represents His union to her, presence with her, and care over her, with her exercises and feelings and affections towards Him in return. O, how He loves His own. There is no telling the love He has for them. Depth it has, which no fathoming line can ever sound, for it has no bottom; and height which even the heavens do not transcend, for it is higher than the heavens; it is without a summit as well as without a bottom. And O, how His own love Him. Not indeed with love like His; but still He has won their affections for Himself, by opening up to them His matchless excellence in the glory of His Person and the riches of His grace; and notwithstanding the contrast between their loves,—a contrast every way as wide as heaven and earth, as God and man,—He would not for all the

universe lose theirs, and they would not for all the world lose His.

I know how the Song is interpreted, sometimes of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter, and sometimes of Solomon and the Shulamite, or of the Shepherd and the Shepherdess, who remained faithful to one another in spite of Solomon; but I cannot subscribe to either the one interpretation or the other. That an earthly love is made the type of the heavenly, I admit; how else could an intelligible canticle or love-song, however spiritual, have been written? but, as in the idyls of the laureate, or in the sacraments of the word, the theme of the song lies behind the outward expression of it! "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

On this account I pass to the consideration of the text in its proper application without any reference to any other. You will observe that it contains an expression of the most affectionate attachment to Christ and a commendation of His transcendent excellence. These are topics which require a spiritual mind and a devout heart to think and speak of them in a worthy manner; and we therefore need to look for the gracious teaching of the Spirit in the consideration of them.

I. The Expression of Love.

And let me say that, if you have any heart-accordance with this expression, any congeniality of sentiment

and feeling with the affection of which it is the utterance, you ought to be more than ready to follow me in the present elucidation and appreciation of its meaning.

1. For observe *it is love to Christ Himself as a living Person that is professed in it.* In His embodied personality, He is the distinct Object of the Bride's most affectionate regard, "My Beloved." And this may serve to show, what is often even fatally overlooked, that the religion which does not carry out the heart to Christ is vain, that the intellectualism of professing Christians in religion, unless accompanied by the actual outflow of the heart's affections towards Christ, is nothing and less than nothing. Christianity addresses itself to the emotions of the heart no less than to the faculties of the mind. It consecrates the moral feelings no less than the intellectual powers to Christ. The faith which it requires is not the mere assent of the mind to the facts and doctrines of the sacred Scriptures. It is a faith which, while it is based upon the revelation of the Scriptures as known and received in the understanding, carries out the desires and sympathies and affections of the heart, and concentrates them with trust and confidence on the Person of Jesus Christ. "With the heart man believeth." "If thou believest with all thine heart." "My son, give me thine heart."

And yet, to judge of Christianity by the mass of its professors, I am not sure but that a stranger to our

faith might be tempted to conclude that it is a matter which has nothing to do with the heart of man at all. For is it not dealt with very much as if it were but a matter of theology, a system of divinity, and nothing more? How few have real, confiding, affectionate fellowship with Christ as a Personal Redeemer. To how many is the Lord Jesus no other than a vague, uncertain, dim idea, a cold, shadowy, impersonal, abstraction, or at best a traditional, historical person of the dead past, instead of a real Person, a living Being of the living present. Put the question to them, "What think ye of Christ?" and they can tell you nothing from personal acquaintance with Him, from personal discernment of His glory, from personal experience of His grace. They only think of answering you by rote, as a child may do, in the language of perhaps some catechetical exposition of His glory: they never deal with the question other than as a question in the science of theology, or as a matter of doctrine in the system of revealed religion.

Do not misunderstand me here. I do not depreciate the importance of a doctrinal knowledge, or of a systematic acquaintance with Bible-truth. Far from it. I only insist that the religion of a believer does not consist of a simple attachment to religious truth, or of the mere reception and acknowledgment of the doctrines of the Bible. Certainly it includes this,—"Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of Me." But it also includes much more than

this,—Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of Me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." And this it is, this "faith and love which is in Christ Jesus," that forms the essence of Bible religion, of Scriptural Christianity. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." So true it is that it is not the doctrine of Christ, but the Person of Christ,—not the system of the Bible, but the Saviour of the Bible, that engages the affections of the heart.

Friends, are you Christians in this regard? I do not at present inquire into the amount or the extent of your Scriptural knowledge. If your heart is cold to Christ, your knowledge, however much, avails but little. For to appropriate the words as quite in point, however used at first of fraternal love, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity"—"love"—"I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity"—"love"—"I am nothing." And what although you have but little knowledge, if you have, as is possible enough, much love for Christ? Not indeed that you should rest satisfied with little knowledge, or that it is ever profitable to have little knowledge. "Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." "Let your minds be filled with all know-

ledge." "In understanding be men." But still, no knowledge, no gifts, no duties, no attainments, can supply the place of love to Christ. This is the question,—"What think ye of Christ?" "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?"

2. And observe again that *this love to Christ is the result of a happy discovery of His loveliness and love.* The principle that there must be some discernment of real or supposed excellence in an object order to its being loved holds true in grace as well as in nature. The Lord must commend Himself to the heart before any one can reciprocate His love. It is impossible to regard Him with the feelings of a devout affection, so long as He is a stranger unapprehended and unknown. This truth, which receives confirmation from the personal experience of every believer, may be gathered from the relations of the text. For, as you may remark, this chapter opens with a very attractive view of the loveliness of the royal Bridegroom; "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." Taking these words in the common and, as I understand them, proper acceptation, the Bridegroom evidently unfolds in them the manifold variety of the attractive excellencies which adorn His person, "I combine in Myself the most glorious majesty as the Son of God, and the most inviting meekness as the Son of man. The perfection of glory and the fulness of grace alike concentre in Me; every attraction and every beauty; I am the embodiment of loveliness itself."

Then, as you may remark again, this representation is accompanied by a declaration of His peculiar regard and loveful affection for His elect bride. Putting His own name upon her, and adorning her with His own loveliness, He sets her forth as living and reigning in the highest esteem and warmest devotion of His heart. "'I am the Lily of the valleys, and as the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters.' Pure and lovely as that virgin flower, so is she in the adornment of My loveliness and purity; and to Me she is thus pre-eminently pure and lovely, because those among whom she dwells have none of My purity, none of My loveliness at all." It is with such a discovery of the glory of His person made to her, in the revelation of the Word and by the teaching of the Spirit, and with a blessed sense of her personal interest in this love and loveliness of His that the faith of the spouse springs up into exercise, and echoes back the manifestation of His love, and the communication of His grace in the responsive commendation of the text: "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is My beloved among the sons."

And here we may surely learn that it is only by acquaintance with the loveliness and love of Christ that we can ever be in case to bestow our affections on Him. Let duty issue its commands to love Him, but without an enlightened discernment of His excellence, the heart will refuse to answer all commands. Other things may, no doubt, be done; but love is a

thing which can never be felt and exercised in answer to the simple call of duty. By tenacity of purpose, by firmness of determination we may constrain ourselves to perform certain acts of practical duty as they happen to be required of us; but we are quite unable to coerce our affections in either one direction or another. Affections, emotions, feelings are not at the bidding of either exertion or inclination. There is no possibility of exercising them, except spontaneously, freely, according to the nature of our moral constitution. The forthputting of even Divine power upon the heart is incapable of producing any gracious exercise of affection. Power cannot beget love. It may subdue opposition. It cannot command affection. It is loveliness and love only that can do this.

And thus it is that the Holy Spirit operates upon the heart in winning its affections for Christ. By the attraction of Christ's merits, virtues, beauties, He overcomes it. "'I drew them with the cords of a man, with bands of love.' Yes, verily, I put aside My majesty and My might when I sought to make them Mine. I dealt with them as they deal with one another, in a way suited to their nature as moral beings, as men. It was a day of power with Me; but not so much the power of force; there was rather the 'hiding' of this power, but the power of love. I told them of My love; I gave to them My love; I wound My love round them as with 'cords,' and 'drew them' as 'a man' would draw or attract a friend, and then

wound it round and round them as if binding them 'with bands,' and so bound them to Myself permanently, completely. 'Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;' lo, therefore, thou art Mine."

Now, do you any of you complain of the coldness of your heart to Christ? Is love to Him an attainment in respect to which you have to own a lamentable deficiency, if not a total shortcoming? I desire you to remember that you vainly endeavour to love Him while you are without the knowledge of Him. Love cannot exist in ignorance of its object. The heart will and must remain cold to Him so long as He is an unknown person. When Mary Magdalene supposed Him to be the gardener, when she did not perceive that it was Jesus who stood beside her, she was only anxious to know if he had taken away her Lord, and where this Lord of hers had now been laid; she was desirous of nothing else from Him; but when, in the kindly loving tones of His own well-known voice, He said "Mary," in an instant her heart leapt out to Him, and she would have thrown herself upon His bosom, and never let Him go. Evidently you ought to acquaint yourselves with Him, to study with much devoutness the Bible representations of His glory, and to seek besides that the Holy Spirit, who is the Glorifier of Christ, may impart to you the spiritual discernment which will enable you to recognise their personal embodiment in Him the living,

loving Friend of sinners. For, as Samuel Rutherford says, "It is little to see Christ in a book, as men see the world on a map;" but to see Himself, to see Him by the illumination of the Spirit, is quite another thing. Let the spirit of wisdom and revelation be imparted to you in the knowledge of Him, and His love shed abroad in your heart, and you will not complain of the coldness of your heart as you have been wont to do; "or ever you are aware, your soul will set you upon the chariots of Amminadab;" you will be more than ready to say with the spouse in another portion of the song, "Because of the savour of Thy good ointments, Thy Name is as ointment poured forth: therefore do the virgins love Thee."

3. And observe yet further, that *this love to Christ is formed and felt on earth amid even its temptations, trials, and crosses.*

For let it be noticed that, while the spouse speaks of the Bridegroom as her Beloved, and compares Him to the apple tree among the trees of the wood, she is herself described by Him in the previous verse as the "lily among thorns," indicating very plainly that we see her here, not in her glorified state in heaven, but in her imperfect, afflicted, and persecuted state on earth,—"As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters." And this account of the spouse very well describes the position of the Church and of the believer in the world. For what with temptations without and corruptions within, there is

not a saint on earth but feels himself, like Paul with the thorn in his flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, or like the children of Israel with the accursed Canaanites, who remained to be pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides, and to vex them in the land in which they dwelt; and what with declensions, and divisions, and persecutions, and manifold other evils, the lot of the Church on earth is more or less distinguished by trial and tribulation. And yet it is in this condition that the preciousness of Christ is felt. In temptations, in afflictions, the believer goes out to Christ, and finds in Him peace, solace, comfort, joy. Let Christ consider his trials and his sorrows, but there is no profit, or at least no enjoyment in himself considering them. Far better for him to think nothing of them, and to think of Christ; and the more they vex him, just to think of Christ the more. This will sustain his heart against temptations and afflictions when nothing else will. No sure support for the soul, no true comfort for it, save in the love of Christ; and, in even the worst of trials, this is support and comfort quite enough. I do not say that the disturbing influences of trials and temptations will not then be felt by the believing soul. I know too well that the believer's exercise at even the best is very much hindered and disquieted by them. They do, alas, too much disturb the perfect repose of his love to Christ, the steady flow of it, the entire out-going of it to Him. Still, although dis-

turbing it, they never quench it; it is deathless in its principle, however fluctuating in its exercise.

Who says that love to Christ, to the personal Christ, can be only realised in the blessedness of heaven; that it is alien to the earthly state; that it is impossible, when He has gone away from earth, and we have still to battle in it through life's difficulties and duties, to love Him with a real, conscious, personal love? No, indeed, you must be brought to love Christ on earth, else you will never be blessed to love Him in heaven. You must become believing, loving disciples in this unbelieving, sinning world, like "the lily among the thorns," else, when the Beloved of the Church comes down into His garden "to gather lilies," you will be dealt with as "sons of Belial, all of you as thorns thrust away, whose end is to be burned." Say, is He not worthy of your love? Why not love Him? Many love Him. Why not you? You plead the business, and the cares, and the trials, and even the trifles of the world as your excuse. It is an utterly inadequate excuse. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me." There now, when by the eloquence of His own most gracious words He seeks your love, and when by the spiritual manifestation of His own loveliness and love, He also shews how much he deserves your love, surely your affections should be won! you should give Him at once the love of a frank and a loving heart.

"Come in Thou blessed of the LORD, wherefore standest Thou without?" "Unto Thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul."

But let me now proceed to the second topic which presents itself in the text.

II. THE COMMENDATION OF EXCELLENCE.

Here two considerations are palpably suggested, and I shall content myself with little other than an expository notice of them.

1. The first is, that *the excellence of Christ is incomparable.* It is surpassing, superlative excellence. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is My Beloved among the sons," transcendant in all excellence.

It is not uncommon in Scripture to set forth the excellence of Christ by some such similitude as this. He is the "Plant of renown." He is the "green Fir-tree." He is the "true Vine." He is the "Tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God, and which beareth twelve manner of fruits, and yieldeth her fruit every month, and the leaves thereof are for the healing of the nations."

With respect to the similitude of the text, it is matter of common observation that the apple tree of our country does not answer to it. In no way does it stand pre-eminent among the trees of the wood. It used to be also said that the apple tree of the East

was as little distinguished among Oriental trees; and attempts were made by those who, from their acquaintance with Oriental languages, countries, and natural productions, were believed best able to form a judgment on the subject, to show that the translators of our English Bible, who had but little knowledge of the geography of the East, had failed to recognise the proper object of the allusion, and that it was not the apple tree, but another tree, the citron tree they said, which answered to the description of the spouse. That they were right in this judgment of theirs, has, however, been of late disputed; at least the author of "the Land and the Book," who, from long residence in Palestine and personal examination of all such matters, may be received as an authority, informs us that neither the citron tree nor the citron fruit possesses the characteristics of the tree and the fruit in question: and that, judging from what came under his own observation, there is rather reason to believe that the old apple tree of the country realised all that is said of the tree in the text, and was in fact, that tree itself. Accordingly, the reference should be allowed to stand as it is, only associated with the image of a tree which in form and foliage, and fruit and fragrance is everything that can be wished, its beauty attractive to the eye, its shade refreshing in the heat, its apples delicious to the taste, and its odours exhilarating to the spirits.

Be this as it may, we must clearly understand that a most blessed counterpart is found in the royal Bride-

groom to all these various excellences. In the loveliness of His person,—"Thou art fairer than the children of men." In the shelter of His atonement, "A man shall be an hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest." In the communication of His benefits: "All spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." And in the savour of His renown: "His Name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee." In all the King's forest, where the Bride walked in company with the Bridegroom, there was no tree so invitingly beautiful and so richly adorned as the apple tree, so, in all the universe and among all the sons of God, there is none like Christ in His loveliness and love, in His grace and glory. Verily, He is "One among a thousand," "the chief among ten thousand."

Behold the angels. Be it that they are the sons of God. We read in Job that, "when the foundations of the earth were laid, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." But Jesus "hath by inheritance a more excellent Name than they," and incomparably transcends them all. Even when He was "made a little lower than the angels," this inferiority belonged only to the human nature which He then assumed into union with Himself; His glory as a Divine Person was as great as ever; He remained the Lord of angels still. "Worship Him, all ye gods." "And let all the angels of God worship Him."

Behold the saints. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "What are these which are arrayed in white robes," "all glorious within," "all comely" without, pure and bright "as the lily among thorns," "not even Solomon in all his glory arrayed like one of them?" Yet with all their glory none can equal "the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys." "Not any tree in the garden of God is like unto Him in His beauty." He is "fairer than the children of men," "higher than the kings of the earth," "more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey," than the holiest of the saints.

"All human beauties, all Divine,
In my Beloved meet and shine!"

And now, among the sons of God in heaven and the sons of God on earth, behold the Peerless One. In the words of sainted Rutherford, whose famous letters are so much in the spirit of this song, "O black angels, in comparison to Him! O dim and dark and lifeless sun, compared with that fair Sun of righteousness! O worthless heaven of heavens, when they stand beside my worthy, and lofty, and high, and excellent Well-beloved! If heaven and earth, and ten thousand heavens, even round about these heavens that now are, were all in one garden of pleasure, decked with all the fairest roses, flowers, and trees that can come forth from the art of the Almighty Himself, yet set but our one Flower that groweth out of the root of Jesse beside that orchard of pleasure,

one look of Him, one view of His Godhead would infinitely exceed and go beyond the smell, colour, beauty, and loveliness of that paradise! O worthy, worthy Loveliness! Oh, for less of the creatures, and more of Thee! Oh, open the passage of the well of love and glory on us dry pits and withered trees." "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood so is my Beloved among the sons."

2. The other consideration suggested by the encomium of this similitude is that *the excellence of Christ is unspeakable.* It is inexpressible, ineffable excellence. It is so transcendently glorious as to be altogether beyond the compass of human speech to utter it.

And hence it is that the language of figure is so much employed in its illustration. There is a suggestiveness of idea as well as a substantiality of form in a trope or metaphor which invests it with a much greater impressive power than is possessed by any ordinary term. The use of it in speech will often flash upon the mind a perfect flood of brilliant thoughts such as no statement in abstract language would ever suggest, and on this account the poet of the song employs the imagery of the text, and, indeed, throughout the song revels in imagery drawn from many pleasant and delightful objects, objects of loveliness, and value, and attraction, such as the richest and most fragrant flowers, the finest and most fruitful trees, the sweetest odours, the most delicious perfumes, the most precious ointments, the mutual exercise of wedded affection in

its pureness, and the scenes and occupations of pastoral life in their beautiful simplicity, in order to set forth the excellences of the well-beloved.

After all, the employment of such a profusion and plenitude of imagery, adapted as it is to heighten our conceptions of the Saviour's glory, is a virtual confession that His glory is so exceeding great as to be beyond it all. And so indeed it is. Yes, and although you were to take all the other images of Scripture and of fancy too, and even although you were to explore besides and ransack all the regions of heaven and earth for objects of comparison and illustration, His glory would be but faintly and imperfectly, very faintly and imperfectly, shadowed forth by them at the very best. For, as the hymn says,

> "Nor earth, nor seas, nor sun, nor stars,
> Nor heaven His full resemblance bears;
> His beauties we shall never trace
> Till we behold Him face to face."

Oh, he requires to have "an excellent heart" and "an excellent tongue" who would exhibit or depict in a worthy manner the loveliness of Christ. Nay, in Rutherford's words again, "Angels' pens, angels' tongues, and even as many worlds of angels as there are drops of water in all the seas and fountains and rivers of the earth cannot paint Him to you," so that there is more truth than quaintness in the paradox of Andrew Gray of Glasgow, a famous contemporary of Rutherford's, — "The best oratory in commending

Christ is silence and adoration,"—silent, speechless contemplation,—silent, speechless admiration,—silent, speechless adoration.

"Come then, expressive silence, hymn His praise!" For indeed, brethren, never can you be said to have worthy or adequate views of Christ, till, rising from one excellence to another, and another, and yet another, and yet another, you are at length compelled to pause, and to fall at His feet dumb, your tongue sticking to the roof of your mouth, overwhelmed with what you cannot express. Every discourse that is delivered on the subject may at least be concluded with the eulogium of the spouse, when, after a most glowing panegyric of the Beloved's excellences, she exclaimed in the abrupt sentence, so powerfully expressive of what is, nevertheless, beyond expression, beyond comparison, and even beyond conception: "Yea, He is altogether lovely." There is nothing in Him but what is lovely, and there is nothing lovely but what is in Him. All beauty, all amiableness, all loveliness, in heaven and in earth, in the Creator and in the creature, meet and centre in Him without measure and without mixture, without change and without end.

"And what shall I say more? For the time would fail."

> "For oh, eternity's too short
> To utter all His praise."

Let me simply say that, if you did but see His loveliness and appreciate His love, it would be your

delight, with heart and soul full of the most ardent affection, to point Him out, and over and over again to proclaim like the spouse to the daughters of Jerusalem, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend." And let me therefore beseech of you to seek in believing meditation upon the Scriptural exhibition of His loveliness and love that you may be enabled personally and experimentally to regard Him as thus, the object of your highest esteem, and to make Him no less the object of your warmest commendation. The language of the text is the honest expression, the heart-felt expression of the living Church, and of every living member of the Church. Every believer understands it, and no one but a believer can understand it, or adopt it either. For you can hear all glorious things spoken of Christ till you die, and yet profit nothing; you may be no better than blind Pagans and Papists, bowing down in worship before a golden image or a marble effigy, which can impart to them no benefit. You must obtain a personal acquaintance with Christ, a spiritual discernment of His excellence, and a believing, appropriating interest in His righteousness and His grace; and then, when He asks in the dispensation of His word, and by the demonstration of His Spirit, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" It will be yours to answer with gracious readiness, with even joyous alacrity, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love

Thee:" "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee:" "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee;" or, at least, as in the hymns,

"Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint;
Yet I love Thee and adore,
Oh, for grace to love Thee more!"

"More love to Thee, O Christ,
More love to Thee!
Hear Thou the prayer I make
On bended knee;
This is my earnest plea,
More love, O Christ, to Thee.
More love to Thee!" Amen.

SERMON IX.

THE RAINBOW ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE.

(A Communion Sermon.)

"And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."—REV. iv. 3.

THE Apocalypse is very much a symbolical book throughout. Its predictions are certainly expressed in a symbolical form; and here, in the second of its grand visions, is a symbolical text of singularly instructive import.

We are about to observe a symbolical ordinance, and the consideration of this symbolical text may be expected to prove by the Divine blessing a very suitable introduction to the observance. It lifts us above all terrestrial instability and vicissitude to the most heavenly of heavenly objects, a throne set in heaven, and occupied by One who, although not named, is evidently the Eternal. To contemplate such an object, or any of its accessories, is quite an exercise for the high day of a communion Sabbath. It was when he was "in the Spirit" that the seer here beheld it; and oh, that we ourselves may be "in the Spirit" when we now lift up our eyes on this surrounding of it, "the rainbow round about the throne,

in sight like unto an emerald." So may we expect our exercise to be profitably directed, and in a way which will be answerable to the services of this occasion.

Let us look in succession at the rainbow, at its position, and at its aspect. There is in each of these topics an amount of significance which is quite sufficient to occupy our attention for the present.

I. The Rainbow.

We are all familiar with it as a natural phenomenon. From our childhood, it has ever engaged our interest when we have seen it appear, like a Divine revelation, on the face of a cloudy sky. This interest has been largely, perhaps mainly, indebted to the Bible-history of its Divine consecration to be the symbol of the covenant with Noah; and, at all events, when it is considered in this connection, there appear to be three things which, in their symbolical reference and significance, are charged with rich instruction, well worthy of the devoutest study.

1. It *proclaimed the fact of the Divine reconciliation.* Between God and men there had been variance, controversy. "All flesh had corrupted their way;" and there had come down from heaven the judgment of the flood, which had swept them from the earth. Would that variance, that controversy, be continued? Occasion would be given for continuing it. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

But the rainbow proclaimed to Noah, as it still proclaims to us, that there is to be no second flood, that the Divine anger which sent the first is turned away, and that mercy rejoiceth against judgment in those wide arms of loving-kindness which are arched out from, as it were, the throne of God, to embrace the earth. In this regard, it is always as much a blessed as it is a beautiful object to behold. As a bow, instead of having the arrows of the Almighty set upon the string to pierce the heart of the King's enemies, it is without both string and arrows, and, instead of being bent earthwards, it is bent heavenwards, as if held in the Divine hand for show, and not for use, so that it may be appropriately said to represent God in the grace of a plenary reconciliation. And what a representation that!

"The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar;" and how lovely all things looked in the resplendence of its beams. And yet, in that bright sun, an angry God looked down on the plain of Sodom. Did ever an angry God look down on the earth from over the rainbow-arch? You see the altar at which Noah offered up his burnt-offering. The LORD smelled a sweet savour in the sacrifice which was laid upon it, He was well pleased with the sacrifice, and the rainbow in the cloud always tells us *that.* And how was it that He was well pleased? It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats can take away sin. Plainly, the sacrifice of Noah was but a type, a shadow,

of the sacrifice which Christ offered when He gave Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. At all events, the rainbow in the text, the rainbow round about the throne, is most certainly symbolical of the Divine reconciliation as founded on this offering and sacrifice of Christ's to God.

Years had come and gone since our Great High Priest had entered with the ever-living virtue of His atonement-blood within the veil, and sat down on the right hand of God; and when, therefore, the seer saw heaven opened, and the throne that was set in it, and Him that sat upon the throne, what could he do but identify the vision with the fact proclaimed so fully by "the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And should not this fact be also recognised and received with all cordiality by us? Or, can we possibly think, that the sacrifice of Christ is in any way unsatisfactory to God, or that He is not well-pleased in Christ with all on whose behalf that sacrifice was offered? What! is the rainbow in the cloud the symbol of the God of peace? And can the rainbow round about the throne be the symbol of the God of wrath, the God of war? Nay, it bears the same import in both the one case and the other; and how, then, like the elders before the throne, should the new song be ever so much upon our lips at the sight, and even at the very thought, of

it. "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

2. And then, in virtue of the Divine reconciliation, the rainbow further *intimated that providence is administered under the reign of grace.* This intimation was certainly made by the rainbow to Noah. It assured him, or it confirmed the assurance, that the curse which sin had brought upon the ground was not to be again inflicted, or at least aggravated, in the way of a second flood. Every time we see it in the sky, the same assurance is, as it were, repeated to us. We are constantly reminded by its mystic irradiation of the dark rain-cloud that we live under a dispensation of suspended judgment, of reigning grace, during which the ordinances of heaven remain to bless us with all the varied gifts of nature in their seasons. Similarly, when the seer beheld it in the heavenly vision, it told him that the throne which it encircled was the throne of grace; and, when he therefore came to see that the book of providence was in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne, he knew that, whatever the outward aspect of the events which might transpire as seal after seal of that book was opened, it was a gracious providence which ordered them; there might appear to be judgment as well as mercy in them, and perhaps far more of judgment; but still, they were all directed by the hand of grace, and in their issue, as well as in their design, would only subserve the purposes and interests of grace.

His own history might also be regarded by him as in many ways confirmatory of the fact. It had been a chequered history. He had seen the faith and patience of the saints; and that same faith and patience he had had himself to exercise. Here he was, a martyr-exile in the mines of Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. It was the hour of his bitterest sorrow. Would he have wished that it had never come upon him? When it was turned into the hour of his ecstatic vision, did he not see that grace reigned in it, and that, in truth, his whole life-history had been a life-history of grace? Oh, what a comfort to know that providence is in the hand of grace, of the God of grace. Let seals be opened, and trumpets sound, and phials be poured out, and plagues be executed—

> "He does wonders then perform,
> Paint the rainbow on the storm."

Be it that the dark rain-cloud betokens the Divine judgment by which the heaven of glory is hidden from us for our sins, surely the ethereal bow of mystic beauty, with which the sunshine spans the cloud, should be at once recognised and welcomed as the symbol of the love which, as "more than all our sins," absolves us from them in the grace of its manifold and most blissful benefactions. Is it not most heartening besides to know that, as evinced by the demonstrations of science, there is a rainbow in every raindrop,

as well as in the far-spread shower, and that likewise there is the exercise of sovereign grace in particular providence and in universal providence together? "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the LORD."

3. After all, the grand purpose of the rainbow was *to seal or ratify the covenant of God.* According to the revelation made in connection with it to Noah, it was "the token of the covenant," the pledge by which God bound Himself in, as it were, visible form to fulfil His covenant. Nor would it be easy to conceive of any token so well fitted for its purpose. Between the natural phenomenon and the moral use to which it was applied, the correspondence is notably exact. It was promised in the covenant, that the waters should no more become a flood to destroy all flesh, and that neither should there be any more a flood to destroy the earth. And what is the rainbow but just the sunshine victorious over the waters, as in full retreat before it? Could anything be more appropriate as a "token" of the covenant which it was "set in the cloud" to seal? It is certain there cannot be a flood in presence of a rainbow.

And here again we must rise from nature to grace, from the covenant with Noah to the everlasting covenant in the Council of peace for the salvation of the Church. How can we fail to do so, when God has set us the example, when He has told us by His prophet that He Himself has done this very thing?

"For a small moment have I foresaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto Me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the errth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee, for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee." Accordingly, when, rapt in the vision of the heavenly places and confronted with the majesty of God, the beloved disciple beheld the rainbow round about the throne, how could he but recognise in it the token, the pledge, that whatever might fall out in the future of the Church and the world, as that future was about to be unveiled to him in Divine Apocalypse, the everlasting covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure, would stand fast through eternal ages, as sure as the throne of heaven, and as God himself on the throne?

And here also, considering that, in the ordinance we are met to celebrate, this everlasting covenant is as really ratified and sealed in its own appropriate symbols as was the covenant with Noah in its rainbow-token, let our faith now rest upon its gracious assurances and provisions in their particular application to ourselves. Oh, how much ought we to look for in connection

with it. Our salvation was first contracted for and promised in it. It is also established by it in the heavens, altogether independent of any deeds of ours, infinitely above our reach and all the instability by which we are characterised and known. And hence, no matter what we are, however ill-worthy, "the imagination of our heart evil from our youth," we may trust without any misgiving to its gracious proclamation from the throne of God—"Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."

> "O my soul's Saviour, let me learn
> In this deep love to live and rest,—
> Let me the precious thing discern
> Of which I am indeed possessed,—
> The love of God as here made known,
> The love that is enough alone,
> The Father's love as all my own."

II. The Position of the Rainbow.

The rainbow is round about the throne—not *above*, as dominating, or *upon*, as occupying, but *round about*, as encompassing the throne; and in this regard its position is as significantly instructive as it is itself. The facts in relation to the covenant which may be said to be denoted by it are of telling import.

1. It evidently *carries us up to the Divine origin of the covenant.* We know that the rainbow is the effect of natural causes operating in obedience to established

law; and, confining ourselves to strictly scientific principles, this view must be accepted as correct. But Scripture teaches us a far higher philosophy than science. It always connects Nature with Nature's God. Hence, with it the rainbow is a positively Divine product. It shows us God Himself parting the sunbeam, and arching it in its sevenfold hues of radiant beauty over the thick cloud. It lets us hear Him putting in this claim to it as His own,—"My bow."

"My bow!" How expressively significant the words! What a depth of meaning in them! They may be most legitimately transferred to the rainbow round about the throne. Faith cannot but hear them again from Him that sits on the throne; for what science can ever account for the rainbow there? "My bow!" "My bow!" And how can it but also hear them in reference to the covenant of which it is the symbol? "My covenant!" "My covenant!" This covenant is most certainly of Divine authorship. It is an exclusively Divine product. The rainbow is made up of various intermediate elements, the eye, the sunshine, and the rain. But not the covenant. It is all God Himself. "I have made a covenant with My chosen. I have sworn unto David My servant. Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations." From beginning to end, its conditions and promises are made up of these "I have's" and "I will's." No other has a hand in either its formation or its fulfilment. The rainbow is above the earth,

where no human hand has set it, or can ever reach it. It is established in the heavens. It is round about the throne.

2. This further *intimates that the Divine majesty rules in the covenant throughout.* It is indeed the covenant of God. And nowhere does He ever more appear as God. In Nature, He holdeth back the face of His throne, so that, notwithstanding the blaze of glory which flashes forth from heaven and earth and seas, few eyes can see Him in it. But the covenant;—just hear this one promise of it. "I will put My laws into their mind; I will write them in their heart; I will be to them a God; I will be merciful to their unrighteousness. I will remember their sins no more." And is not that the very style of majesty, the proper language of the throne? And say, when is majesty more like itself than when it dispenses mercy; when is the throne more august than when it is the throne of grace?

Let us never suppose that God has abdicated His throne when He dispenses mercy, that He has laid aside His majesty when He exercises grace. "God is the LORD which hath shewed us light." "It is God that justifieth." If you would see the glory of Jehovah, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God; if you would understand the counsels of eternity; if you would be satisfied with the administration of providence, and enriched with the outgivings of grace and mercy, look here,—at the throne and Him

who sits on it: it is "the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and every perfect gift." He is encompassed with covenant splendours, above, below, on every side, and all His revelations and communications of grace, of glory, pass through these covenant splendours. "And He that sat on the throne was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne."

3. Once more, by the position of the rainbow, we are assured that *the covenant will never pass from the Divine remembrance.* Down in this cloud-land of sin and suffering, we hear it so often said, we say it ourselves ever so often, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" We hear it said by even Zion, "The LORD hath forsaken me, and my LORD hath forgotten me." Nor does He seem to wonder at this complaint; at least He has provided a most effective answer to it: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will not I forget thee." And more than that, He has appended His signet-seal to this and every other promise of the covenant: "And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth;" Oh, how lovingly tender this, "I bring the cloud!" "And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud," "and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant," "and I will remember My covenant."

And is not that satisfying? When, on the Passover night, the children of Israel had sprinkled the blood of the paschal lamb on the lintels and side-posts of their house-doors, God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." He did not say, "When you see it." Their seeing it might bring them peace, but it would not bring them salvation. It was His seeing it that would do that. So with the rainbow. He does not say, "When you look upon it, you will remember My covenant." No doubt you may do that, you should do that. But He does not say so. He says, "I will look upon it,"—"I will remember my covenant." Could anything be more assuring, more sustaining? When you are looking at the rainbow, He is looking at it. When it is reminding you of the covenant, it is reminding Him of it as well. It is, in truth, for Him to look at, more than you. It is a remembrancer for Him, much more than you. You ought to look, and to remember too. And oh, the comfort of a mind at rest which this should bring. Yet it is not on your looking, or on your remembering, that your salvation turns. There must be no mingle-mangle in this great matter. You have nothing to do except simply to receive the blessing, to enjoy the blessing. You believe that? You do. Or does unbelief prompt you to say, "But the bow is on earth's side of the cloud, not on heaven's side. How doth God know? Can He judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to Him, that He seeth

not; and He walketh in the circuit of heaven." Look up. Above the height of the stars, where no clouds float, where no storms blow, in the profound repose of His heaven-pavilion, around the brightness and magnificence of His glorious high throne, God has flung the seven-hued radiance of that mystic arch; it is there before Him, ever in His eye, ever in His view. He must shut His eyes, or abdicate the throne, if He would not see it; how can He be but mindful of His covenant? He hath remembered His covenant for ever; He will remember it; He must remember it. "There is, there was a rainbow round about the throne."

III. The Aspect of the Rainbow.

The natural rainbow is of varied hue; but green is the prevailing colour in the rainbow round about the throne—here said to be "in sight like unto an emerald."

Now, let us observe why this rainbow has so much in it, not of heaven's, but of earth's colour, not sky-blue, but emerald-green.

1. It *indicates that there is a refreshing beauty in the covenant which is never wearisome to look at.* To some eyes all colours are alike. Beauty is unknown to them. They are, if not blind, at least colour-blind. But to eyes which can delight in scenes of loveliness, how pleasant always, how refreshing always, is the green. Other colours, even heaven's own azure-blue,

soon dazzle or fatigue the vision. The earth's soft emerald-green never does. Hence the prevailing colour of this rainbow.

To look at the throne, and Him who sits on it, in the fire-light resplendence of His holiness, "like a jasper and a sardine stone," how can we do so without having our eyes, as it were, burned out? But with this emerald-green of covenant love and grace all round, how the sight of that very glory becomes a beatific vision. We see God and live. The beauties of His holiness, the splendours of His majesty, the fire-beams of His justice, the sun-rays of His goodness, are so blended, softened, mellowed in the sweet and tender rainbow-revelation of the covenant that it is more than a pleasure to behold them. Oh, say not that the grace and the glory of the covenant are hidden from you. It is impossible to look up to Him who sits on the throne without seeing them in the gentle radiance of this rainbow which is round about the throne. Neither allow yourselves to say that they are too bright for you to look upon, or that, except it be by hasty and stolen glances, your eyes are soon dazzled in looking at them. They are really most refreshing to behold. You may gaze upon them ever so long without unpleasantness or fatigue. Why should you ever be in haste to turn away from contemplating them? "In sight like unto an emerald." Verily this is a soul-satisfying as well as a soul-saving sight. The true Peniel is in view of it. "I have seen God face to face; and my life is preserved."

2. And again, this emerald-green of the rainbow *may be held to intimate that there is an essential unity in the covenant, whatever variety may circumstantially distinguish it.* There is no rainbow without the sevenfold variety of the prismatic colours, yet these colours are all harmoniously blended together in its arch of beauty; at least, they are *so* blended together by the prevailing green of the rainbow round about the throne. And yet, again, the symbol is in this regard significant. There is a manifold variety of Divine promises and blessings which at sundry times and in divers manners have been given in sovereign manifestation from the throne; but they are all suffused with the one ever-permeating tint of grace, new covenant grace. There is a millionfold variety of Divine dispensations in the providence and the grace which are administered from the throne, some of them wrapt in considerable mystery, some of them marked by apparent contrariety and contradiction, some of them not a little trying to faith and patience in their painful disciplinary influences, but all of them pervaded by the harmonising and mellowing emanations of loving-kindness, the loving-kindness of the covenant.

Oh, how delightfully the emerald-green rainbow symbolises this "well-ordered" covenant — "ordered in all things." For the more the covenant is scrutinised, the more transcendent it appears. It is so perfectly arranged, so admirably contrived, like the many-hued tracery of the sunbeam when braided upon

the cloud, that all the wisdom of men and angels could not mend it in the smallest point—could not improve it in the most minute of its details. The glory of the LORD God omnipotent is most illustriously displayed in it, with every Divine attribute resplendent in the consummate harmony of an infinite perfection. The seed of the Redeemer are also provided in it with all things that pertain to life and godliness—pardon, free as heaven; righteousness, purer than an archangel's robe; faith, the gift of God; all things for time, all things for eternity, ample as human needs, transcending far the utmost grasp of human capacity in its most magnificent comprehension. Read but one sentence of its charter-writ, "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come—are all yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." "What shall we then say to these things?" "He that reproveth God, let him answer it."

3. Yet once again, *the everlasting duration of the covenant may be said to be shadowed forth in the emerald aspect* of "the rainbow round about the throne." For the green of the emerald is of an unfading hue—an ever-green; and at all events this emerald bow is eternally immutable, like the throne itself, which it surmounts: fit sign, therefore, of the covenant, which stands fast as the days of heaven for ever and ever.

Here is none abiding, no continued stay. This is

an ever-changing world we live in. Our fathers, where are they? and the prophets—do they live for ever? Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. Numbered, weighed, and found wanting. Divided and given away. Be it so. Let us be exercised and tried with disappointments, vexations, griefs, bereavements, reverses, calamities, ever so many and so great; let us behold our favourite schemes burst, one after another, like the froth-bubbles on a stream, and pass away; let us stand amid the wreck of blighted loves, blasted hopes, and ruined joys, and cry with bursting heart as we look around through blinding tears, "Ichabod! Where is the glory?" Still, in even these circumstances, and amid even the wreck of a universal ruin, let us look up, above the hill, to the throne of God; and, round about that throne we shall descry the emerald rainbow of the covenant, to which the faith of patriarchs and prophets was directed, on which they loved to gaze, and which to the end of time shall continue to reveal to the spiritual vision of all who have obtained like precious faith, a gracious God in immutable eternity; and seeing in it, moreover, the guarantee of a perpetuity of blessing through Jesus Christ our Lord, we shall be ever ready, and more than ready, when the Spirit of the LORD speaks by us, and His word is on our tongue, to testify with David in his last and almost his best words,—"Although my house be not so with God, yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and

sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire; although He make it not to grow." *

Now, brethren, the establishment of this covenant does not belong to us. It is for God Himself to attend to that. But we must proclaim His own desire and offer to have it established between Him and you: "Incline your ear and come unto Me; hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." You hear *that*. Do you respond? "Do Thou for Me, O God the Lord." "Do as Thou hast said." He has done it, done it from all eternity in the council of peace on your behalf; and He is here to-day,—shall I not say at this very moment?—doing it over again in the preaching of the Word, so as to embrace you personally in the love-bond of its peace.

There is a covenant with hell. Are you in that covenant? It must not be allowed to stand. The sooner it is broken so much the better. There is also the covenant of works, which does not need to be broken. It is broken already, long, long ago. Can you be lying under the ban of its broken bond?

Here is another covenant, the covenant of promise, the covenant of peace, the covenant of grace, the covenant of God, which cannot be removed or abrogated; the everlasting covenant, ratified by the death of its Mediator-surety, and signed and sealed in the sacramental ordinance of the communion supper. You see the

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

bow in the cloud. You did not make it. Neither did you make the covenant of which it is the token. You had no hand in its formation and establishment. Yet it stands fast for ever; and you rest upon it with a full assurance; you know and are persuaded by the LORD that the earth will no more be destroyed with the waters of a flood; of that salvation you do not entertain a doubt. And is it not the case that you have had as little hand in the formation and location of the rainbow round about the throne? Yet, without any origination or other operation on your part, there it is, and also the covenant of which it is the symbol. Why should you not be as sure of the salvation offered, pledged, and covenanted by it, as you are sure of the salvation of the Noachic covenant which the rainbow in the cloud attests and seals.

Come, let us look up in the communion ordinance to this sublimely sacred rainbow, the rainbow round about the throne. If we look down, we shall see nothing but the curse. If we look round, we shall see nothing better, nothing but sin and suffering. If we look within, what can we see there? Nothing but sorrow in our heart daily. If we look forward, what can we see at all? Men and brethren, look up; gaze upon that emerald bow of covenant faithfulness and love and mercy, till you have taken in all the mystery of its meaning and all the mercy of its blessing, and till you have it then to say to the praise of the glory of the grace of God, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and

forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul." * Amen.

* Psalm ciii. 1, 2-5, 22.

SERMON X.

THE IMPROVEMENT OF DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS.

(After Communion.)

"And the LORD went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place."—GENESIS xviii. 33.

PERHAPS no historical personage is more looked up to with reverential regard than the patriarch Abraham. Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians vie with one another in venerating his memory as that of one who was signally favoured by being taken into special covenant-relationship with God. As saith the Scriptures, "He was called the Friend of God," and the friendship which obtained between them was largely evinced in the familiarity of their communion. We learn from the chapter in which the text occurs that the LORD had graciously condescended to meet with Abraham as a man with his friend regarding the doom of Sodom, and that Abraham had earnestly pled that the execution of the doom might be stayed if there were found in the city fifty righteous persons,—forty, thirty, twenty,—even so few as ten. It is not my intention to dwell at present on this particular incident in the history of Abraham, although it is certainly

worthy of a prayerful review; but to make use of it as a starting point from which to consider the gracious manifestations made by the LORD to His covenant-people, and the conduct which is becoming on the back of such manifestations. These topics may be appropriately considered by us in following up the privileges of the recent sacramental communion season. Oh, that they may be profitably considered. LORD, manifest Thyself, and command a blessing. So will we render the calves of our lips and the free-will offerings of grateful service in our lives.

I. THE GRACIOUS MANIFESTATIONS.

The historical record of this chapter will guide me in the observations I may offer, but, in their substance as well as in their purpose, these observations will mainly bear upon the general subject.

1. And it is certain that *the manifestations are still granted on special occasions, in a manner suited to the character of the present dispensation.* I say, "In a manner suited to the character of the present dispensation," by way of precluding the idea that we are warranted to expect such sensible manifestations as were granted to the saints of old when they were as yet without the Bible, or when the canon of its revelation was as yet imperfect. Since the completion of the volume of inspiration, there has been a "sealing up of the vision and the prophecy;" and, whatever may be said of New-Jerusalem visions and Mormon-

revelations, and other fanatical superstitions, we may safely leave them, unsustained as they are by anything that deserves the name of evidence to those who so foolishly allow themselves to be deluded by them. Yet there are manifestations which we must not call in question,—spiritual manifestations in connection with the Scriptures, and by means of them, as accompanied by the gracious illumination of the Holy Spirit, which carry with them their own evidence, an evidence so peculiar, so unique, that such as are favoured with the manifestations cannot but know that God is with them of a truth.

By the men of the world the reality of such manifestations may be denied; and the accounts of them may be derided as the vagaries of religious fanaticism. Nor need we wonder that it should be so. When Moses came down from the mount where he talked with God, his face shone with supernatural lustre, and all Israel saw it. When Stephen, full of faith, was arraigned before the Sanhedrim, all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly upon him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. But there is no such visible lustre reflected from the countenances of those to whom the LORD is pleased to manifest Himself by His word and Spirit, as He doth not to the world, in the intimacy of a spiritual fellowship. They look, they walk, they work, they speak, they eat, they drink, they sleep, like other men. No change is wrought by their high and holy privilege

on the outward aspect of their persons. Nothing external is to be seen about them but what is common to the race. As their privilege is spiritual, so are its effects; and hence it is not extraordinary that those who are strangers to it should think and say that it is imaginary and visionary, if not worse. Of that which is outward and visible they may form a judgment; but of that which is spiritual and supernatural it is impossible, for them without the faculty of spiritual discernment, to know anything.

There is, however, a reality in Divine communion and its attendant manifestations, although the men of the world know nothing of them, and although they may be ready to ascribe them to enthusiasm and fanaticism. I appeal from their judgment in the matter. There are those in the Church of Christ—I trust there may be some of them among ourselves—oh, that that there were many—who can echo the testimony of the Apostle John as expressive of their own experience: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Let this decide the fact. It ought to do so. The privilege is no fancy. It is a fact as decisive as life itself. "And hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us."

2. Then observe that *the Divine condescension in the manifestations is every way fitted to excite the highest*

admiration. Every Divine manifestation ought to be productive of this effect. We know how the magnates of the earth live above and apart from those beneath them. Eastern monarchs immure themselves in their palaces, and hardly ever allow themselves to be seen in public; and even among ourselves, it is chronicled as worthy of the national regard when our beloved Sovereign lays aside the majesty of state, and mingles with her subjects in any way, in even the acts of religious worship, where all men are equal before God. And had the LORD shut Himself up in the thick darkness, had He spread a cloud over the face of His throne, and dwelt in a pavilion for ever inaccessible to human vision, or even to human knowledge, this had been nothing to be marvelled at. We might have cried, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him," and found no answer to our cry but its own unsatisfying, unavailing echo; or, had there been an answer, it might have been in the way of His coming forth in judgment to punish us for our iniquities. And this, indeed, is just what we have merited at His hand; such a manifestation of Himself as would make us try to hide ourselves, like Adam and his wife among the trees of the garden, or cry like those who will shout on the great day to the mountains and the rocks: "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne."

Now, take creation-manifestations; how much there is in them of love and goodness! That, in consequence of the Fall, an enormous change has passed over the

works of God is true. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake;" the most destructive elements have been brought into operation; "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain;" and the wonder is that the world has not been altogether converted into a Golgotha—"the place of a skull," and an Aceldama —"a field of blood." But, in the midst of the wrath which might have been looked for—which could only have been looked for—what wondrous mercy! "The LORD is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works." "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "Nevertheless, He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

And then of redemption-manifestations—what shall we say? There is the revelation of Himself in the Holy Scriptures. There is the incarnation of Himself in the Person of His only-begotten Son. There is the immediate indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer; and there is the spiritual communion which He maintains with His people, through the medium of Word and ordinances, shedding abroad His love in their hearts, conforming them to the image of His Son, making them partakers of the Divine nature, and preparing them for the inheritance of eternal glory. These are manifestations of Himself unspeakably gracious. Angels wonder at them; and well they may. They

are mysteries of grace far surpassing all other mysteries, before which they bow in profoundest adoration of the Divine majesty and mercy in them. If we ourselves know any thing of them, as indeed we ought, they should also awaken our own profoundest admiration, and we ought no less to feel as if we could never evince enough of gratitude and praise on account of them.

3. Yet, along with the admiration produced by these manifestations it is equally true that *they have a very humbling influence and effect on all.* Any Divine manifestation is really fitted to produce humility and self-abasement in those to whom it is made. Angels, in His presence, veil their faces with their wings. The monarch, pacing the roof of his royal palace, and contemplating the dome of heaven studded and spangled over with gems of brightness, becomes in his own esteem as nothing. "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers—the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained." "What is man that Thou art mindful of Him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?"

Very signally is this effect produced by those manifestations which are gracious in their nature and design. When the LORD turned aside to visit Abraham on the way to Sodom, as if He could do nothing in the destruction of that city without, as it were, consulting him like a friend—"Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? we might have expected

to see the patriarch presuming upon this condescension by an undue familiarity. But no. There is nothing of the kind. There is the very opposite. "And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." We are all familiar with the case of Job—how he acknowledged on occasion of the Divine manifestation which terminated his trial—"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The case of Isaiah, when he saw the LORD high and lifted up, and His train filling the temple with His glory, is quite as familiar—"Woe is me, for I am undone; for I am of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Daniel too, the "man greatly beloved"—"all his comeliness was turned into corruption, and he retained no strength," when the LORD shewed him "the great vision." And who does not know how it happened to the beloved disciple on occasion of the apocalyptic vision in the isle of Patmos? "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead."

It is easy to understand how such manifestations should be productive of humility and self-abasement. When you are at any time in company with an eminent saint, does not the contrast between him and you make you little in your own eyes, and ashamed that you come so far short of what you ought to be, with your

manifold opportunities and means of grace? And when the LORD is pleased to meet with you at any time, how can you but feel the infinity of the contrast between Him and you? As light discovers deformity and impurity, the manifestation of His holiness must make your own want of holiness most painfully and even overwhelmingly palpable to your humbled consciousness. It is this, in fact, which makes Divine manifestations so hateful to the ungodly. They cannot bear the contrast brought out by them between the LORD and themselves. It overwhelms them with the certainty of condemnation. They see no way of eluding the doom which they have justly incurred by their evil ways; whereas, in the case of those who have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, Divine manifestations, although attended with humbling effects, have at the same time, an attractive influence, so that, instead of being repelled like Peter, when he said to Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," they draw near, as it is here said that Abraham did, while confessing that he was but dust and ashes.

4. And here let me take occasion to observe that, *to engage in intercession for others is one specific way of improving gracious manifestations.* It is just as when Queen Esther came in before Ahasuerus, and the king said unto her, "What is thy petition? and what is thy request? and it shall be granted to the half of the kingdom." For, turn to Abraham, and see how he appears as an intercessor on behalf of Sodom. And

when any believer gets into the secret of communion, how should his heart go out in the same way? How should he hold up the case of his relations, of his friends, of the Church, of the world? There is perhaps no exercise more common among believers in the secret fellowship of a communion-table than that of prayerful intercession for unconverted persons among their kindred and acquaintanceship. Many a Christian parent has there mourned over and prayed for a thoughtless prodigal, like Abraham in that yearning petition of an anxious fatherhood, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" Many a Christian minister has there pled in holy agony for the flock of his spiritual charge, like the Apostle Paul in his "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel, that they might be saved." In truth, it is only when thus exercised on occasions of Divine communion, that Christians can be said to be like Christ, when He "appears in the presence of God for us," when He "also maketh intercession for us." Oh, to be Abraham-like, Christ-like, in this blessed business of intercession, to stand in the gap and to plead, "Spare Thy people, O LORD, and give not Thine heritage to reproach." "Let it alone this year also."

Brethren, do you live in a godless neighbourhood? What is to become of that neighbourhood if the LORD comes down to behold its wickedness? Can you contemplate the issue without painful apprehension and prayerful intercession? Or have you those near and

dear to you—in your own household, or among your kindred—that are far off from God? And what, then, is your duty when you are near? Is it not to plead, in all the fervency of communion prayer, that the same grace which has brought you near may bring them near as well, so that they and you may rejoice together in the common faith of the great salvation? How can you hold your peace?

5. And now, allow me to remark once more that *special manifestations are of but temporary continuance in the present state of imperfection.* Certainly, signal manifestations, like that which was granted on the present occasion to Abraham, never continue long. Sooner or later they pass away. They may be sinned away by our own folly, or, without any fault of ours, they may be bidden away by the LORD Himself as having served their purpose. "The LORD went His way as soon as He had left communing with Abraham." Jacob wrestled all night at Jabbok with the Angel of the covenant, but at daybreak the Angel departed, leaving him the blessing, and he returned to his family and his flocks. There was a transfiguration-scene in the life of Jesus, and not infrequently there is something of the same kind in the experience of His disciples; but in their case, as in His, the overshadowing cloud comes down; the glory disappears, and they are left to go upon their way. What a moment of entrancement *that* must have been to Mary Magdalene when Jesus revealed Himself to her by naming her in

His old familiar intonation, "Mary!" Oh, nothing will interrupt their communion now. It is too blessed to admit of any intervention. "She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni." "But Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not"—Hold Me not, detain Me not—"for I am not yet ascended to My Father." How different this from what we might have expected, and from what we should have at anyrate desired. When at any time we are favoured with signal manifestations, say, for instance, at a communion time, it is so natural to say like Peter on the mount of transfiguration, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; let us make tabernacles to dwell in;" but, as it is added, "Not knowing what He said," it is inconsistent with the present state, with the duties of it, with the trials of it, that such manifestations should remain. They are good for the time being. They serve to stimulate our faith, our hope, and other graces. But it is only in the future state, when sin shall be for ever done away with, when all our trials shall be ended, and all our graces shall be perfected, that they shall perpetuate themselves in the immediate beatific vision and fruition of God in Christ for ever and ever.

II. The Incumbent Duties.

These deserve to be practically attended to, as bearing upon the proper improvement of communion privileges.

1. First of all, *we have to attend with all fidelity to the everyday business of common life.* "The LORD went His way as soon as He had left communing with Abraham; and Abraham," it is added, "returned unto his place," returned to the encampment of his family and servants, and flocks and herds. Many appear to think that religion and business can never go on harmoniously together, that the two require the exercise of different faculties with different rules of life, and that, therefore, either the one or the other must so far give way if we are not to fail in both. Under this impression, the Church of Rome recommends very many of her devotees to immure themselves in monasteries and nunneries, believing that religion requires an asylum from the turmoil of this busy world, and that it can only thrive in the seclusion of a solitude. There are also not a few among ourselves who have no thought of anything but the comforts of religion. It is a time of love with them, when they see the King in His beauty, and the land that is far off. Let the light of His countenance shine upon them, and all is well. Yet, require them to attend to the duties of common life, to go down from the mount of sensible communion, and their religion, they suppose, is gone, so that they set themselves to sigh and sob away in mournful plaint,—

"But ah! when these short visits end,
Though not quite left alone,
I miss the presence of my Friend,
Like one whose comfort's gone.

I to my own sad place return
  My wretched state to feel;
I tire and faint, and mope and mourn,
  And am but barren still."

This is quite an erroneous way of thinking and feeling in the matter. Religion is not confined to the observance of certain solemn ordinances or the enjoyment of certain comfortable experiences. It has to do with human action and enterprise in every pursuit, in even the most ordinary occupation. It has to step out upon the highway to govern common life in every position and relation, to hallow all the business and commerce and intercourse of the world. Divine manifestations, so far from being meant to interfere with its influence in this respect, are both adapted and designed to make it still more effective in the sphere of its every day operation, to stimulate us, in short, in the ordinary duty of our station as the duty in which we are called to glorify God, and by which we are being best prepared to enjoy such manifestations again when they are repeated perhaps here, and, at all events, hereafter, in the uninterrupted communion of eternal glory.

You are probably acquainted with the legend of the monk who, in a devotional ecstacy, beheld, as he conceived, the crucified Redeemer, and heard Him speaking from the cross very sweet and comfortable words to him. The monk was entranced by the singular grace of the mysterious vision when the convent-bell

began to ring, summoning him away to the performance of other duty. It so happened that on that day it was his turn to distribute the ordinary dole of alms to the mendicants at the convent-gate, and the bell intimated that the hour of distribution had arrived. What should he do? The vision held him. The bell called him. Oh, that bell. Never did even the "passing" bell give forth such an unwelcome sound. He will not hear. He will still enjoy the vision.

"And a storm of thoughts within him
Blew hither and thither long,
And the bell kept calling all the time
With its iron merciless tongue.

"He looked in the Master's eyes,
And he sprang to his feet in strength;
Though I find Him not when I come back,
I shall find Him the more at length.

"He went, and he fed the poor
All at the convent-gate;
And like one bereft, with heavy feet,
Went back to be desolate.

"He stood by the door, unwilling
To see the cell so bare;
He opened the door, and lo!
The Master was standing there.

"I have waited for thee, because
The poor had not to wait,
And I stood behind thee all the time
In the crowd at the convent gate."

There now, take home the lesson. I assure you that it will be worth your while. "Let every man

wherein he is called, therein abide with God." "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

2. *We have also need to be constantly on our guard against yielding to temptation.* For, after a season of spiritual and Divine communion, we may assuredly count upon being assailed by the great adversary, who walketh about seeking whom he may devour. To go down from the top of Carmel into the dens of lions and of leopards, or from the palace Beautiful, on the summit of the hill Difficulty, into the Valley of Humiliation, where Apollyon is to be encountered, and through that dreadful place, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where the pilgrim is so beset with devils that he is ready to think himself a devil, is not a very uncommon thing in the experience of religious life. It is as with Jesus Himself at the Jordan of His baptism, the Spirit descended and lighted like a dove upon Him, and the voice of the Father attested Him from heaven as His Beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased; and then we are more than amazed to read, "And immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan, and was with the wild beasts."

The first thing recorded of Abraham after the present instance of Divine manifestation and communion, is the trial of his integrity in reference to Sarah his wife, with his unhappy failure under the temptation, his distrust of covenant providence, and his unexcusable

dissimulation out of apprehension of his life. Then, at the very first sacramental communion of the New Testament, we read of Satan entering into Judas, and of Jesus warning Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat." And then, again, after the rapture of Paul into the third heavens, where he heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter, he tells us, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh—the messenger of Satan to buffet me—lest I should be exalted above measure."

Brethren, remember Noah, and Lot, and David, and Hezekiah, the signal mercies they received on occasions of Divine communion, and the sins to which they afterwards gave way upon temptation; and, believe me, if there is any passage in Holy Scripture which may be appropriately addressed to you when the LORD has been blessing you above many with the manifestations of Himself and the communications of His grace, it is that of Paul, "Be not high-minded, but fear;" or that in which Jesus said to the three disciples who saw His glory on the mount and His agony in the garden, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

3. Once more, *we are called upon to trust the* LORD *for grace to strengthen us for duty as well as against temptation.* For, though signal manifestations may pass away, His covenant relationships remain unchanged amid all the vicissitudes of experience and

the uncertainties of time. To instance yet again the case of Abraham: Although the LORD went His way as soon as He had left communing with him, He still remained his God according to the covenant, and in the promise of the covenant He still assured him of everything he needed to carry him through both life-duties and life-trials. "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect." "I am God All-sufficient, and in My all-sufficiency, upon which, in every circumstance of life you will be always free to draw, you will ever have enough, and more than enough, to sustain and strengthen you to life's end." And yet, again, to instance the apostle of the Gentiles: When, after the abundance of the revelations, he was vexed with the thorn in his flesh, and buffeted by the messenger of Satan, how satisfying the answer to his thrice-repeated prayer for deliverance, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Surely he might well say, on receiving such an answer, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Brethren, here is the spring of the Christian life, the secret of success in the Christian warfare; in the all-sufficiency of the LORD, that all-sufficiency which is treasured up in Christ, and upon which a thousand passages of Scripture warrant us to draw according to our utmost need. "When I am weak, then am I strong," weak in myself, oh, how weak, not more so

is the bruised reed which the passer-by treads under foot; but "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." "I know both how to be abased, and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." To this experience the men of the world are utter strangers. They cannot understand it. But to us it is no riddle. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding to know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." "For He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Yes, here it is,—the covenant of promise, which stands fast for ever, whatever else may change. Moses may stand in the rock, the LORD may make all His goodness pass before him; but when the vision is past, there is an end of it: whereas the proclamation of the Divine Name—the word of the LORD—endureth for ever. Peter may be with Jesus in the holy mount: and there he may see Him in all the glory of the transfiguration-scene; but that scene of glory does not last a day; and, when it is over, what is it that remains? What is it that Peter remembers to his dying day as far more important than the transfiguration-scene itself? It is the voice which came from the excellent glory, the testimony of the Father to His well-beloved Son. "We have also a more sure word

of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts." "For He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, so that we may boldly say the Lord is my Helper," literally my Helper in the way of running to my help whenever I cry to Him in a time of need; He may not be standing by in special manifestation, but He is not really absent; at the first cry for help He is present on the instant, so that we need not fear.

I must not wind up this discourse without noticing what followed upon this season of communion between the LORD and Abraham; and I notice it by way of admonition to those who are strangers to all gracious manifestations, because alienated from the life of God, and enemies in their mind by wicked works. It is this,—Down came the fire of Divine destruction upon Sodom and Gomorrah. So long as the communion lasted between the LORD and Abraham, the destruction was suspended,—there was respite for the guilty city; but when Abraham's last intercession was over, the LORD went His way and executed the destruction. Had Sodom repented before the LORD went His way, Sodom might still have been as the garden of the LORD, and He might have delighted in it as in His temple; but the impenitence of Sodom lasted a day —an hour—too long, and in that hour fire and brimstone consumed it from before the LORD. The inter-

cessions of the godly in the enjoyment of Divine communion may still arrest the arm of vengeance. It is not possible to say how much the impenitent are indebted to godly relatives and acquaintances for standing in the gap and pleading on their behalf. "For, except the LORD of hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been made like unto Gomorrah." What, if thy parent or thy friend is at length with Abraham at his intercession, "O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once." If, after "this once" is over, the LORD goes on His way, it is sad to think how it may fare with thee. "Can thine hands be strong, can thine heart endure, in the day when I shall deal with thee?" "I the Lord hath spoken it and will do it." (Ezekiel xxii. 14.) The alternative is before you. Why will ye die? The Lord turn you, and ye shall be turned! Amen.

SERMON XI.

THE INHUMAN TAUNT.

"If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."—Matt. xxvii. 40.

THESE words do not appear to be quite unfamiliar. Our memory is stirred by their utterance. It occurs to us that we have heard them before, or at least words like them; and the question instantly presents itself, Where and when did we first hear them? It is not long ere the wilderness temptation comes up to mind. Very little do we understand of this temptation. The narrative, like that of the first chapter of Job, unveils the spirit world, and we there behold the hidden powers and agents by which the events and circumstances of personal, as well as universal, history in this world of ours are directed, influenced, and moulded. At any rate, whether in the body or in the spirit I cannot tell, but very probably it was in the spirit, Jesus is seen standing on the pinnacle of the temple almost within sight of Calvary, and Satan on His right hand challenging Him as here, "'If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down,' leap down, jump down, and the people will hail Thee, worship Thee as

the Christ, the veritable Messiah that should come into the world."

On the present occasion, the spirit-world is curtained off from view. A thick, dark veil hangs over it. We see the human instruments of the temptation as we did not see them in the wilderness, though it is more than likely that they were there as well. Anyhow, the challenge here, as there, is more than human. It is, indeed, satanic. Those who address it to Jesus speak as possessed and prompted by the spirit of evil, of their father the devil. The prince of darkness is here to do battle with the Prince of Light and Life, and he throws down the gauntlet with the challenge. This is indeed his hour and the power of darkness. The temptation to come down from the cross in answer to the challenge must have been intensely strengthful. It is impossible for us to imagine how much the impulse to respond to it with sovereign majesty had to be resisted by the Crucified. The former temptation was, no doubt, powerful in its way. Entering on His public life and ministry, we can at least partially understand how strong the inducement was to descend from the pinnacle-height of devout loyalty to His Father in the self-sacrifice of a suffering Messiahship, to the standing of a miracle-working monarch, guarded by angels in His empire over an admiring subject-world. But now, in closing His life under circumstances so changed, indeed so inexpressibly painful, how much stronger the temptation. Why should He suffer this ignominious

and excruciating death when, in His Divine Sonship, He might at once enter on His heavenly glory, and command the adoring homage of a universe of angels?

And can we be backward to believe that the enemy of God and man is still at work in the world, seeking to induce the sons of God among us to jump down from the heights of their sanctity, or come down from the crosses of their suffering to the standing of an ordinary earthly life, with the assurance that, as the sons of God, they will come all the easier, if not quite as soon, to their glory in the kingdom? It is, now-a-days, quite fashionable to deny the existence of the the devil, to laugh at our old beliefs in evil spirits as exploded superstitions, and even to maintain that the doctrine of human depravity is no other than a priestly figment or idle myth which has been disproved and disowned by the intelligence of this enlightened age. And so, according to this unbelief, there is neither devil nor depravity on earth. Men are born pure and good, without evil dispositions or inclinations, made for virtue, and for nothing else. Yet what a world we live in! How wickedness abounds, or rather superabounds. It is everywhere to be met with, in all countries, among all classes. "There is none righteous, no not one." "There is not even a just man on earth that doeth good, and sinneth not!" And how account for so terrible a fact without depravity and without a devil?

"Tell me 'who mixed the fatal draught
That palsies heart and brain;
And loads the bier of each passing year
With ten hundred thousand slain?
Who dogs the steps of the toiling saint,
And digs the pit for his feet?
Who sows the tares in the field of time,
Wherever God sows His wheat?
The devil is voted not to be,
And of course the thing is true;—
But who is doing the kind of work
The devil used to do?'"

Is all the evil in the world chargeable upon man alone? Is it all naturally deducible from a birth-innocent humanity? Is it virtue that vents itself in vice? Is it sanctity that manifests itself in sin? Is not such a view as slanderous as it is preposterous? To hold that the abounding impurity and wickedness of men the wide world over is entirely the outcome of a native purity and goodness—that all are born Albinoes, although not so much as one Albino is anywhere to be found among them—is not this too bad—a veritable libel on our race? No; human depravity is a terrible fact which meets us everywhere, in spite of gainsayers. And that there is a devil in the world, who is as busy as ever in his old ways, is another fact quite as terrible. It may not be fair to charge him with all the wickedness of men. Let human depravity be charged with its own full share in the universal evil-doing. But, as scoffers often say, "Give the devil his due;" for most certainly he will get it. His temptations of Eve, of David, of Peter, of Judas, of

our Lord, of all others, will yet be made to recoil upon himself with the greater condemnation.

Listen to this prayer of Jesus, when on the cross, for those who hung Him there—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do?" Was Jesus mistaken when so He prayed? Did they really know that they were killing the Prince of life, crucifying the Lord of glory? The devil knew. Hell was quite alive to what was going on. So Jesus lifted up no prayer of intercession for him or for his accursed crew; whereas for the blinded men who were even then imbruing their hands in His precious blood—how He regarded them with compassion—how He prayed for them with tenderest entreaty. Surely He did not so pray for them in vain. Who can read in the Acts of the Apostles of the conversion-grace by which not a few of them were brought home to God, and say that it was in vain? Woe to those who put themselves by their persistent unbelief beyond the reach of His intercession. Their doom is no less terrible than certain—"Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

This challenge by which Jesus on the cross was so pitilessly taunted is one which has been often addressed as sharply to His disciples, and perhaps in the present day even more so than ever. Sometimes it may take one form, and sometimes another; but, whatever the form, the spirit as well as the point of it remains unchanged.

"*If Thou be the Son of God,* come down from the cross!" "The Son of God!" As one with the Father in the essential Deity of Creatorship and Redeemership—how can the Son of God be crucified—how can any Divine dignity belong to Him on the cross? No matter what testimony may be said to be borne to Him from heaven—no matter what evidence may be brought forward as borne to Him in the Scriptures—and no matter how His disciples confessed Him to be the Son of God, and even adored Him as Lord and God—the cross, if He remains upon it, falsifies these pretensions. There is but one God, and if there be but one Mediator—and *this* that Mediator—the cross proclaims Him to be but a man, no other than "the man Christ Jesus." For who can believe in a man like Him as God? How can God be crucified? How can God be put to death?

And again—"If Thou be the Son of God, *come down from the cross!*" Is it possible to believe in the religion of the gibbet—in the Christianity of the cross? An atonement to law and justice! How can such a thing be required by the God of love? A propitiation for the sins of the world! Really, are those sins so deadly, so direful, that no propitiation can avail for them but the blood of the Lamb of God? Do away with the thought of an atonement. Put away all idea of a propitiation. Jesus, in the purity of His character—in the holiness of His life—a martyr in suffering—an exemplar in righteousness—a teacher of virtue

—a king of men—we may Hosanna even in the highest; but the cross! Except it be studded with diamonds and set in gold—is an offence—to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Who can find a religion of peace in a religion of blood, though it be the blood of sacrifice? How can God delight in the gore of slaughter? Destroy the gallows-hill of Calvary. "Come down from the cross."

And there are yet other forms in which this challenge may be put and pressed through the temptation of Satan in his enmity to the Son of God and the atonement of His sacrifice. The utterances of prophecy, how confused and even contradictory they appear! What of the glowing predictions of the New Testament day beside the tragedy of the cross? Who can recognise the Messiah who should restore all things in this "Jesus which was crucified?" "Ah! Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross." But no; He does not come down. And what, then, of His Kingdom now? Where are all the Apocalypses of the Messianic glory? Or be it that "He is risen, as He said;" that, though once dead, He is now alive again for evermore. But "where is the promise of His coming? for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." So the scoffers of these last days serve themselves heirs to the scoffers around the cross.

Yet how little did the scoffing priests and scribes

and elders think that their taunts and jeers were worse than silly,—were, from the religious standing they professed to occupy, even stupidly absurd. Had Jesus done as they demanded, would He have shewn Himself to be other than a Simon Magus, a wizard or magician, who might have been popularly but ignorantly proclaimed to be "the great power of God." Let Him pluck the nails out of His hands and feet, let Him take a torch and set fire to the cross, so as to burn it, let Him command the legions of heaven to bring a golden chariot on which He might ride forth in state and triumph to the throne of a universal monarchy as the Son of God, and they would then believe on Him. Would they? Dotards! not to see that, if, as the Son of God, He had allowed Himself to be hung on the cross, He must have had some great purpose in view which could only be fulfilled thereby; and that to come down from the cross without fulfilling this specific purpose was the one thing He would not and could not do. "He saved others," they scornfully acknowledged, without thinking of the value of their testimony in this regard; while they as little thought of the no less plenary value of what they further said in the cutting jibe, "Himself He cannot save!"

Would it not have been wise to wait and watch the providential issue of this mysterious suffering and death of His? When Copernicus discovered that this earth, instead of being the centre of the universe around

which the sun and moon with all the stars revolved in their several orbits, was only one of other stars or worlds in the planetary system of which the sun is the actual centre, it was objected that, if this view of the system were correct, Venus ought to present, as it did not appear to do, various aspects or phases in the different stages of its revolution. At once Copernicus admitted the objection, and confessed his inability to remove it. Still, he maintained, and proved by decisive evidence, that the earth was but a planet like Venus itself, revolving in its orbit round the sun, and that, notwithstanding the non-appearance of phases in Venus, such phases did actually take place, so that, as he contended, if we only had eyes to see far enough, we should certainly see them. And so, as all astronomers know, it actually came to pass. When the telescope was invented, and Galileo turned it upon Venus, its phases were at once discovered, as Copernicus had said. How true the aphorism of the philosophers and scientists themselves, "All things come to such as labour and wait in patience." Certainly there is nothing like "tarrying the LORD'S leisure" for the solution of difficulties in Scripture, providence, and grace. Three days only, and the mystery of Calvary was all explained,—not by Jesus coming down from the cross, but by His coming up from the sepulchre, when indeed He was "declared to be the Son of God, with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead."

And who does not know that ever so many Scriptural and other difficulties, on the score of which the Church has been sorely harassed by agnosticism and scepticism in scornful challenge, have been quite as decisively resolved? The minutiæ of Scripture are certainly as consistent with the fact of inspiration as are the minutiæ of Nature with the fact of creation. Scripture and science, Genesis and geology, may be readily proved to be, not in opposition to one another, but in genuine harmony, when they do not intrude into one another's domain. The chronologies of the Old and New Testaments, as those of Moses in the one and Stephen in the other, have been very happily reconciled upon careful examination. The alleged mistake of Luke in calling the deputy-governor of Cyprus a pro-consul, instead of a pro-prætor, has turned out to be no mistake at all. It has been demonstrated from Cypriot coinage and history, that the mistake, so long insisted on as incontrovertibly certain, was that, not of a blundering Luke, but of the blundering sceptics. And so with Daniel's Belshazzar, who used to be triumphantly held and declared to be a fictitious personage according to the historiographers of ages. By the decipherment of the arrow-headed inscriptions on cylinders and tablets which have been dug out of the mounds of Babylon in our own day, Belshazzar has been authenticated after thousands of ages to be an actual personality, and the reigning monarch in the home-empire of Babylon at the period

of its overthrow by Cyrus. And be it that other objections are still pressed,—but answers to them are even already forthcoming, or they will be ere long; and how the enlightened wisdom of the twentieth will laugh to scorn the agnosticism and scepticism that dared to even speak of them in this so boastful nineteenth century.

The disciples lost heart when they saw their Master crucified. Not only the two that went to Emmaus, but all the rest of them appear to have given up the cause for lost. "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." How had they forgotten that He had again and again assured them of His resurrection from the dead? Others were not so unmindful or forgetful. I hardly think that the priests and scribes and elders who stood around the cross flouting Him with their railing mockeries were quite at ease, as if sure of their success. "The infatuation of crime ordinarily dissolves at the moment when crime is perpetrated, and it is not improbable that, in the mind of some at least, a ghastly fear had already succeeded to the joy of gratified revenge." * What if, after all, He should save Himself, come down from the cross, and sweep them out of the earth into Gehenna with the besom of destruction? But six hours pass away; and, notwithstanding the earthquake and the rending of the temple veil, with other preternatural portents of fearful augury, there is no descent

* Isaac Taylor's "Saturday Evening," Chap. I.

from the cross; nay, because the Sabbath is at hand, the soldiers are ordered to terminate the sufferings of all the crucified, so that their dead bodies may be taken down and buried before the hours of sacred rest, only it is found that, in the case of Jesus, death has anticipated the action of the soldiers—that He is actually dead already. Yes, actually dead already. There is no mistake about it. Let Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus bury him, if they please. In our day, when an execution is over, the doctor feels the pulse of the man who is supposed to be now dead, applies the stethescope to his chest, certificates his death, and the magistrate delivers the body to be buried as that of one who is now ascertained to be actually dead. Nor were precautions neglected to be taken then. The soldier's spear-thrust pierced the heart of Jesus before He was taken down; and when He was buried, a great stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre, and a watch was set of Roman soldiers, so that the disciples should not steal away the body, and allege that He had risen again, as the priests remembered that He had said He would. But utterly vain were all precautions. It was not possible that He should be holden of death. Behold there is a great earthquake. The angel of the LORD descends from heaven. He rolls back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sits upon it. The soldier keepers are panic-stricken. They fall prostrate as dead men. "Why seek ye the living among the dead? Ye seek

Jesus which was crucified. He is not here. He is risen, as He said. Behold, He goeth forth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him. Lo, I have told you." Plainly we may now scorn the scoffer's jeer about the confusions and contradictions of the ancient prophecies. The complex-like Providence, at the horrid cross of which they flouted with taunt and grin as quite a maze, is demonstrated at length to be "Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan." And why should we allow ourselves to be stumbled by the mysterious hieroglyphics of either Apocalyptic or other prophecies? They, too, will be no less interpreted and fulfilled in turn.

And are you tempted, like the disciples, to despond and lose faith in the gospel of salvation, even like the Master Himself, to jump down from the pinnacle of the temple, or to come down from the suffering of the cross? "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Behold, we count them happy which endure." What though you be in heaviness through even manifold temptations. As the poet says of the "mimic battlefield" in the "Royal game" (chess)—

> "The Tyro sees
> Hopeless confusion and dire chaos hurled
> In its opposing ranks, and knows not these
> Exist but in his ignorance and want of skill,
> O'er which will best prevail—patience and strength of will."

"We know," at any rate, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Murmur not against His sovereign providence. Stumble not at His holy word. Bear crosses, suffer afflictions, endure temptations.

> "Oh, it is hard to work for God,
> To rise and take His part
> Upon this battlefield of earth,
> And not sometimes lose heart!
> Workman of God, Oh, lose not heart,
> But learn what God is like;
> And in the darkest battlefield
> Thou shalt know where to strike.
> Thrice blest is he to whom is given
> The instinct that can tell
> That God is on the field, when He
> Is most invisible."

"Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." "Trust in the LORD." "Delight thyself also in the LORD." "Commit thy way unto the LORD." "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him." "He that believeth shall not make haste." "And the Lord direct your heart into the love of God and into the patience of Christ." Amen.

SERMON XII.

THE EFFICIENT SYMPATHY OF CHRIST.

"For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."—HEBREWS ii. 18.

THE sufferings of Christ and the glory by which they have been followed, are said to form the study of angels. "Which things the angels desire to look into." Surely we also should desire to do so. From His relation to us and ours to Him, our interest in them is unspeakably greater; and ought we not to give them a proportionately increased attention? Such, however, is the vastness of their scope and reference, that eternity will be required by angels and us together to study them as comprehensively and as fully as they deserve. At all events, we are for the present quite unable to overtake their study with any measure of satisfactory completeness. It is but in part that we can attend to them at any time; and, indeed, the best that we can do is to take them up and look at them part by part, and, even of a part, just here a little and there a little, as from "the infirmity of our flesh," or the weak capacity of our spiritual apprehension we may be able to bear. Now turn to the text. Here is presented to us a part-view, so to speak, of this great

subject. It bears upon one aspect of the sufferings of Christ as taken in connection with their practical bearing in a given direction, and this will be quite enough to occupy our present meditation.

The sufferings of Christ, viewed in their Divine aim and object, were penal, sacrificial, expiatory, atoning; "in things pertaining to God to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." They can never be understood or appreciated in any proper way, except as they are so considered. The uniform apostolical testimony respecting them turns on this; it is the one ever-recurring theme in connection with them, or in connection with the proper benefit realised from them. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." At the same time, other objects, subordinate and subsidiary in their own way, but nevertheless of great importance, were also secured by them. For instance, they were exemplary as well as atoning, and the benefit to be obtained from them in this regard is incalculable; they read us lessons which, in respect of their practicalness and perfectness, are absolutely without a parallel. Besides, apart from their bearing as viewed in their mediatorial relation to God and us, they affected Himself in a very important way; and this too must be taken into account in our consideration of them. Plainly, they could not but exercise upon Him a disciplinary influence of a kind which must have had no small share in the development of His character, an influence in this

respect which must have materially affected the formation, or at least the exercise, of the spirit in which He bore them, and also His personal regard for those on whose account He bore them.

The disciplinary influence of His sufferings, as thus considered, forms a leading part of the apostolical teaching in this chapter. For instance, we read of Him as made "perfect through sufferings," "as in all things made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God," sayings these which evidently intimate that, by His personal experiences as a sufferer, He was taught and trained, in the experimental or moral sense, to be all the truer to the interests of those for whose benefit the performance of His official functions devolved upon Him, and that, indeed, His whole practical sympathies were developed and drawn forth by those very experiences on their behalf. This, in short, is the teaching of the text, and it is expressed in a most kindly, instructive way. Those for whose sins He made atonement are nevertheless exposed in the present life to ever so many perils, trials, sorrows, afflictions and temptations, in which, under the impulse of His sympathy, as this has been perfected from having been Himself subjected to the same afflictive experiences, He strengthens them with the truly needed and welcome grace of a seasonable help. "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

There are here two facts which are well worthy of attention at any time; and I trust that it may be found profitable to attend to them at present, the suffering of Christ, and the succour which, in virtue of that suffering, He may be relied upon to extend to sufferers.

I. The Suffering.

Our attention is, of course, limited in this connection to the one aspect of it. I shall not venture to travel beyond the instruction of the text.

1. Limited accordingly, let it be observed that, in the literal and proper sense, *it was personal suffering.* This is impressively indicated by the use of the word, "Himself." It is not said "He suffered," but "He Himself suffered." And there is no redundance or tautology in the use of this expression. There may be a suffering in the sufferings of others, without any endurance or experience of them by ourselves, the suffering of sympathy as awakened in us by merely beholding them. And, certainly, Christ is no stranger to such a suffering. His acquaintance with it is involved in the reference of the text; but then it does not occupy the foreground. This is given to the fact that His sympathy is prompted and governed by a positive personal experience of suffering in His own individual case; and hence the word "Himself" is used. The apostles were particularly careful in their whole teaching concerning Christ, to make it turn in the

same way, or in some equally expressive way, upon Himself. Whether they foresaw it or not, it is certain that He has often been Himself put very much out of view in the consideration of His suffering. Many have thought and spoken of this suffering as if it were a kind of impersonal thing, a thing of which, in His proper personality, He could hardly be said to have had an actual experience, an experience like our own, or at least equivalent to our own; they have lost sight of His humanity in His Divinity; and indeed He is little other to them than an ideal conception, or at best an impassive incorporeal spirit. For our part, we can never allow ourselves to think of Him in such a way, and we must never do it. Whatever it be that may at any time engage our attention in connection with Him, He must Himself be always the central object of it. Our faith is nothing but as it turns upon Himself. All other graces, too, turn in like manner upon Himself. Take the cross, Faith looks to it; hope also; love also; why? not as a cross, but as His, the cross on which He Himself was hung. Plainly, if it were lawful to have a figure of the cross, it ought to be the crucifix, the cross with Christ upon it. So, in the present connection, we could not attend to the suffering in question simply as suffering; rather would we instinctively turn away from it. Our faith is drawn to it, our heart is interested in it, as His suffering. It is our own Friend's, our own Brother's suffering. "For in that He *Himself* hath suffered."

2. This prepares us to observe, in the next place, that *it was positive and most painful suffering.* The text evidently directs attention to it as such. It has been sometimes supposed to refer to the suffering which He endured when tempted, or as tempted; but this is by far too limited a view of it. The meaning is, not that He suffered in being tempted, though indeed this did occasion Him much suffering; but that He was tempted in having suffered. On this account we must attend to His suffering itself, if we are to form any proper estimate of the way in which He was tempted by it. And here we at once behold in Him the Prince of sufferers. For real, varied, overwhelming, severest suffering, there never was a sufferer like Him. Probably others may have suffered more in respect of physical agony; but in this respect the greatest sufferers have often had but little to endure. Not that it was but little that He endured in such a way. Look to Calvary. "*Ecce homo.*" "Behold, the man." The physical agonies of crucifixion made Him *such* a sufferer. But His other suffering, mental, moral, sentient, spiritual suffering, the suffering He endured in all the relations, affections, and interests of life, from friends, and followers, and foes, from their unkindness, unfaithfulness, misrepresentation, reproach, treachery, cruelty, the suffering He endured from Satanic temptation and Divine desertion, when enveloped in, as it were, the darkness of hell, and when heaven itself was also enveloped in that very darkness, how can we estimate,

what can we say of, His suffering in these respects, in such respects? Unquestionably we think by far too little of it. Be it that it should not be so much thought of by itself or apart from its designs; still, how can we appreciate its adaptation or its adequacy to this design, except as it is itself considered in connection with it? If we fail in so considering it in the present connection, the whole truth that is made to turn upon it, is lost to us; and we must entirely fail to derive any real blessing or any profitable lesson from it.

3. Be this as it may, let me observe again that, *in all its reality, variety, and extent, it bore the special character of temptation.* Temptation is not necessarily in itself an evil thing. It properly means "To make trial of," "to put to the test," "to subject to proof." This, to an intelligent being, a moral being, may be a very painful process, although nothing that is evil, either in itself or in its issue, may be associated with it. That it is often presented and pressed with an evil intention, and with also a disastrous result, is certainly true; yet this must not be identified with itself; it is additional and quite distinct. "God did tempt Abraham," as He also may tempt us; nor, in either case, with other than the best design and issue. As with the patriarch, it may exercise and increase our faith, our love, our patience, our obedience, our grace; it may develop and strengthen our whole moral being and character. The devil, too, may tempt us, does tempt us,—but with the very worst of objects;

nevertheless, the issue here again may be just as glorious; so far from resulting in our moral ruin, it may accomplish the precisely opposite result,—our establishment in God.

Now, when Christ suffered, He was tempted, His whole suffering told upon Him as temptation, sore temptation; and it is easy to see how. We must not forget that, in the assumption of humanity, He assumed it in its entirety, with all its sensibilities, both natural and moral. Accordingly, He was every way as susceptible of its antipathy to suffering as we are ourselves. He recoiled from it with the very same antagonistic instinctiveness, and He could not possibly do otherwise. Of this Satan was also evidently aware. He found no taint in the humanity of Jesus; but it was a real humanity, and how He therefore tempted Him as possessed of it! One memorable passage, the temptation in the wilderness, must here occur to every one; and it may be taken as very much a specimen, though an outstanding specimen, of the life-long temptation to which He was more or less subjected by all His suffering. Why should He, the Son of God, be required to submit as the Messiah to want, or privation, or hardship of any kind? If He hungered in any appetite of His nature, why should He not obtain the provision adapted to the craving? If it was not laid to His hand in a natural way, why should He be hindered from satisfying His need in another way? If He can make bread of stones, why

should He not? Or again, why should He have to lead a humble life in the form of a servant when, as the Son of God, the Messiah, He ought to be hailed and honoured everywhere as Lord? "No cross, no crown," is a very unnatural way of attaining to universal sovereignty. Why should He not at once seize upon the crown without the cross? Or yet again, why should He ever require to be circumspect and watchful, or on His guard against falling from the pinnacle of the temple, from the Zion-heights of holiness? Were He to fall, even to throw Himself down, —He, the Son of God, the Messiah of God, how could He be the worse? Were not angels on His side? Was not the God of angels on His side?

Oh! the mystery of the temptation. I do not, cannot, understand it; but I am sure that it was real; that it wrought upon His human instincts, which were quite sinless in their natural exercise, and endeavoured to lead them astray in a sinful direction; and that, in short, He had to maintain a sharp, constant, and unyielding conflict with it. And just so in all His humbled, suffering life. What resolution it required, what endurance, what faith, what fortitude to submit to that humiliation and suffering! Why should He have to do it, when it cost so much? Why should men have any hand in obliging Him to do it, when it was for their sakes He did it all, or why should God, when He did always those things that please Him?

Thus was it that He was "tempted,"—"tempted" through His instincts, senses, feelings, desires, reasoning powers, and moral affections; "tempted in all points," from outward occasions and instruments of temptation, "like as we are." But, oh, how gloriously He endured it, overcame it. Like gold he stood the test, though it tried Him sore; He came out as pure as ever, the same as ever. For, if flesh and blood quivered, quailed, as sometimes in very agony they did,—and indeed, they would not have been flesh and blood had they not so quivered and quailed,—"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me,"—yet how He mastered the strife of tortured feeling! how He subdued the instinctive stern antagonism to endurance! how He repulsed every suggestion, every temptation, to rebel! "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." "Oh, My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." "He suffered, being tempted,"—"tempted like as we are;" sometimes in one way; sometimes in another; from the devil; from men; from even God; "tempted in all points like as we are;" yet "in all things," "without sin," like as we are not.

But we must refrain from going any deeper into the vast profound of this great mystery. Enough that we recognise, and, so far at least, appreciate the fact.

Let us proceed to the consideration of its practical bearing as presented in the text. That it has many

other practical bearings, bearings of the greatest moment, both as respects Himself and the nature and issues of His mediatorial action in the atonement, or as it is called in the context, the "reconciliation," has been already stated; but it is impossible to overtake them severally at present. The help or succour which His personal experience of temptation prompts and enables Him to impart to His disciples, when they are tempted, is quite sufficient to engage in full our present attention.

II. The Succour.

Yet, in preliminary, observe again, although only for an instant, that it is imparted to those for whose sins He made reconciliation or atonement. The description, "them that are tempted," applies to them. They are reconciled to God, yet tempted. They are at peace with God, yet tempted. They are in communion with Him, yet tempted. In truth, they only can be said to be tempted, at least in the way of enduring it, bearing up against it, overcoming it, like their Master. Others, like dead fish, are borne along without resistance by the stream. They must suffer, but they are not tempted. They just suffer and sin, and sin and suffer.

O ye tried and tempted ones, who are called to endure, it may be "a great fight of afflictions," to "war a good warfare" with "the sufferings of this present time," in order to hold fast your integrity as the

Lord's, whom He has bought with a price, and formed for Himself to shew forth His praise, you are here in the world as He was, filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in your flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church; for should not the disciple be as his master and the servant as his lord? only you do not tread the wine-press alone like Him. You have fellowship with Him in your sufferings, and He has fellowship with you. "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God!" * "For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

1. Now observe, in the first place, that *this succour is accompanied with the truest sympathy.* "If ever I fall into a surgeon's hands with broken bones," is a remark which has become almost proverbial, "give me one whose own bones have been broken." The point of the remark is abundantly evident. Our knowledge of temptation or trial is measured by our personal endurance of it. How can those who have never known what illness is, enter with the tenderness of a perfect fellowship into the chambers of the sick; or how can those who have never known a want understand with a matter-of-fact experience the anxieties of the poor and needy? You are tried or tempted by some suffering experience, or in some particular way.

* Dan. iii. 25.

You go to a friend, and unfold to him your grief, all your suffering and sorrow. Somehow he does not give you the response you wished, and perhaps expected. There is no want of kindness, of even brotherly kindness; but your heart is not satisfied with that. You find that he has never himself so much as tasted the cup of which you have been drinking, that he has never known a grief like yours, and that he never passed through any experience of the kind at all. Between him and you there is a great gulf, a want of actual fellow-feeling, of true and proper sympathy in the case. You afterwards go with your tale of suffering to another friend; and ah! you see at once that this one understands you, that he enters fully, and so tenderly and lovingly, into your whole case, your whole experience. "Yes, brother, I know it. I understand it perfectly. I have myself felt it. I have gone through it, through it all. You and I are one in suffering, in sorrow, in entirest sympathy."

Brethren, do I now require to point you away from earth to heaven, from friend and brother to the Friend of friends, the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, than any brother, to Jesus Himself, who was the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and who, in respect of sympathy, is still acquainted with it. He understands your case, for it was His own. He understands you suffering, for it was His own. He understands your trial, your temptation, for indeed, in some way or other, it was His own. Yes, and although He

is now away from actual suffering, from personal sorrow, still He and you are one in a far closer, deeper, even more vital, sense than that of sympathy. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." When the branches are pruned, does not the vine feel it in the bleeding outgush of its living sap? And who, and what, shall separate us from the love of Christ, from the sympathy of Christ?

Surely you cannot think that His perfect sinlessness detracts in any measure from the reality or the energy of that sympathy. Had He not mastered His temptations, risen above His sufferings, passed through them all unconquered, would He have succoured you? could He have succoured you? would you have even cared that He should succour you? Say, were you a widow—and some of you are such, "widows, indeed, and desolate"—could you be comforted by one who was herself uncomforted? What right would she have, or what heart either, when she was herself a rebellious murmurer? And if you have sunk under affliction, or yielded to temptation, how can you be lifted up by one who has sunk and yielded too? It is he who has not fallen that is able to lift you up when fallen. Oh, how gladly you ought to listen to the words of Jesus: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. I have overcome the wicked one. By the sacrifice of Myself I have overcome and put away sin also."

Yes, friends, when "the archers have sorely grieved you," and all your friends prove to be "miserable

comforters" and "physicians of no value," when they "stand at a distance from your sore," perhaps galling you by harsh reproof, or freezing courtesy, or but simple failure of appreciation. Oh, how near, and gentle, and tenderly, and wisely gracious is the good Physician, our beloved Saviour.

> "I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
> Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed
> My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
> To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
> There was I found by One who had Himself
> Been hurt by the archers; in His side He bore,
> And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
> With gentle force, soliciting the darts,
> He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live." *

"For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted," without yielding to the temptation, "He is able," meritoriously able, morally able; for such is the primary force of the expression, "able to succour them that are tempted."

2. And here observe again that *this succour is imparted with the utmost promptitude.* The reader of the original Scriptures readily observes, in a way that readers of our version scarcely can, that this is very delicately, but not the less pointedly, intimated in the teaching of the text. The apostolical word, which is translated "succour," means derivatively "succour conveyed by one who runs at the cry of distress for help;" and I do not believe that it was undesignedly

* Cowper, "Task."

or unmeaningly used. Our Saviour, although now in heaven, is still possessed of His humanity and all its sympathies; and He is not above their impulse, however completely He may be beyond their pain.

Almost the only Scriptural sight we have of Him in heaven affords a striking illustration of this fact; and it may be appropriately instanced as in point. It was when the proto-martyr was surrounded by His enemies, and about to fall a victim to their fury. Ravished by an Apocalypse of glory, his heart bounding with hallowed exultation, and his face as it had been the face of an angel, the dying sufferer exclaimed in the outburst of his transport, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Oh, mark! "The Son of Man." His humanity has not been lost in the brightness of His glory—has not been absorbed in the essence of His Divinity. "Standing!" not "sitting," as He is doctrinally represented. "Standing;" for, prompted by His fellow-feeling with the perilous situation of His servant, the bowels of His compassion yearn over Him, and He can no longer sit upon His throne. He starts from it as if to hasten to the forlorn sufferer, to solace Him in His sufferings, and to crown His martyrdom by receiving Him into His glory. Nor let any ever say that this is but a solitary instance of His compassionate readiness to help the suffering in their need. The same thing has taken place in thousands upon thousands of cases. We ourselves have

seen, and bear witness. Could it really or possibly be otherwise? "He hears the young ravens when they cry;" "and shall He not hear His own elect which cry day and night to Him? I tell you that He will" hear and also help "them speedily."

3. And now, let me finally observe that *this succour is conveyed in the form of actual deliverance or effective relief, or at least adequate support.* Evidently the ability to succour, which is spoken of in the text, is not possible or potential ability, ability quiescent, or in repose. It is practical ability, ability in the immediate, positive, actual, personal outcome or forthcoming of its gracious exercise. Yes, it is far more, and in a sense far better than any exercise of even the truest and the heartiest sympathy. Such a sympathy is indeed most welcome; let it not be slighted in any case; but how often does it only discompose and sadden us, when it is found to offer no relief beyond the fellowship of tears? I know not whether sympathy without succour, or succour without sympathy, is the more unacceptable on occasions of distress; and I hardly care to know, for both the one and the other are together possessed by Christ, and obtained in Christ. The writer of this epistle plainly desires us to understand that we may rely with all confidence, as doubtless he did himself, upon the gracious heart and the powerful hand of Him who, with the truest, sweetest, entirest sympathy of a perfect fellowship, can also deliver us —will also deliver us—from all our troubles, anxieties,

and fears. Our sufferings may be great, our temptations strong, our trials numerous, weighty, overwhelming; but let us cast our burden and our care upon Him, and to our comfort,—oh! such comfort—we shall find that, although our power and our hope be gone, He will not forsake us, He will stir up His strength, and come and save us, perhaps proportioning temptations and trials to our strength, or opening up a way to escape that we may be able at least to bear them; or, perhaps, as in Peter's case, sending an angel to strike off our fetters, and open the prison doors, and lead us home; or, perhaps, as to Paul in prison, coming Himself, and standing by, and strengthening us in the all-sufficiency of His grace with inward strength; and, at all events, giving us at the great day the crown of life in the glory of a perfected humanity, perfected like Himself through suffering, so that we may then sit together in heavenly places as even glorified together.

Now, I must not conclude without again reminding you, as I would in little other than a sentence, that all this sympathy of His is connected with His reconciliation or atonement for your sins. There is, no doubt, a sympathy in Christ, a mere natural human sympathy, which may be exercised, which has been often exercised, apart from that atonement or reconciliation; but, although genuine, and even generous in its exercise, it is not saving; and it should not be considered effective in such a way, however much and

often it may be said in the present day to be so. Look at Him in tears. He wept over the city; but it was a city doomed and destroyed for all. Come, my hearers, into His bleeding bosom. Hide, oh hide, in His pierced side, in the spear-cleft depth of that atoning sacrifice, the blood of which flows forth from its gaping wound. The current of His grace runs in the current of His blood. It is the virtue of His blood-shedding which imparts the pulse and energy of life to the virtue of His tear-shedding.

"Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins." "From their sins!" Then what will He not save them from? Surely from their sufferings, from their sorrows, from their temptations, from all their troubles! Yes, in things pertaining to God, our High Priest is both merciful and faithful to make reconciliation for our sins; and therefore we know and are persuaded as of life itself that this is true, as true as truth, as true as God—"For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able" in tenderness, in compassion, in loving-kindness, and with efficacy, invincible efficacy, Divine efficacy, "to succour them that are tempted," that are tried—"to succour" us when we "are tempted," when we are tried. Amen.

SERMON XIII.

THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."—2 TIMOTHY i. 12.

AN uncommon interest attaches to this Second Epistle to Timothy as the last epistle which came from the apostle's pen. He was now living in immediate prospect of his departure. And this departure was not of the kind which falls to the ordinary lot of men.

> When "light forsakes their closing eyes
> And life their drooping head."

He was a prisoner in Rome for the Gospel's sake, and the axe of the headsman was next to already sharpened for him at the place of public execution beyond the gate on the Appian way. On this account, we dwell upon the personal references in the Epistle with profound regard. Those which directly express his own faith are, in the circumstances, most touchingly impressive. The dying testimony of a Christian is always weighty; it fascinates our attention with an irresistibleness to which it is ever pleasurable to yield; but how much more attractive and impressive the

dying testimony of a martyr, or, as in Paul's case, of an apostle-martyr.

The utterance of the text is one of the most winning in the whole epistle. The sweetest strain of celestial music could hardly be finer, more thrilling, more inspiring. Familiarity with it does not lessen the exquisiteness of its charm. Its wonderful attraction grows upon us the more our attention is turned upon it.

> "As for some dear familiar strain
> Untired we ask, and ask again,
> Ever, in its melodious store,
> Finding a spell unheard before." *

It is also marked by a singular combination of definiteness and indefiniteness which adds not a little to its interest. What a clarion-ring, how clear, how telling, in the personality of its address throughout, "I know," "I have believed," "I am persuaded," "I have committed." Even the indefiniteness of its other expressions, so far from diminishing, intensifies all the more its pithy significance, "Whom I have believed." "He is able." "That which I have committed unto Him." "Committed unto Him against that day." Who ever asks, Of what person, or of what day, speaketh the apostle thus? knowing that the references cannot possibly be to any person or to any day, but the Lord Himself and the day of the appearing of His glory.

What a field of profitable study is here opened up

* Keble, "Christian Year."

to us; and what a rich return may be obtained from digging into the almost untouched mine of its inestimable treasure. We cannot go down at present into the depth of the mine; but we may endeavour to make a practical use of the faith and the assurance which are quite visible and at hand upon its surface. These two things will of themselves sufficiently reward an exclusive, if only it be a due consideration of them.

I. The Faith.

This lies at the foundation of the assurance by which it is accompanied. The assurance is, in fact, impossible without the faith. It would be like a house of cards which the slightest drift would tumble over. By not a few who complain, sometimes very bitterly, that they want the assurance, that they cannot say, "I know," "I am persuaded," it would be well that they attended much more, at least in the first instance, to the faith, "Whom I have believed," "That which I have committed unto Him."

With the apostle the faith was first, as it is always first. Let us make it the subject of foremost consideration. It is here presented in a twofold aspect; and provided we understand that there is no essential difference between the one aspect and the other, it may be very advantageous to consider either aspect of it in turn.

1. *It consists of trust in Christ, reliance on Him for*

salvation according to the revelation of the gospel. It will be observed that the name of Christ is not mentioned in the text. It did not need to be. On the part of Timothy there could be no mistake as to the reference. Of whom could the apostle be understood to speak but of his Master, his Saviour, to whom he owed himself, the redemption of his life, the salvation of his soul? That he does not name Him, may be held to intimate that both Timothy and himself knew Him so well, that neither of them could possible think of any other in the case. There is none like Christ. There is none but Christ. He is not one of many. He is not even, except in poetry, "the chief among ten thousand." He is without a peer. He is alone.

To know Him as the Mediator between God and men is essential to your trusting Him. It is quite plain that faith must have knowledge for its basis. You cannot trust a person whom you do not know, You may try any one at random; but who would trust any one at random? You must know the person whom you trust to be reliable,—one that, in respect of probity, integrity, and ability, is worthy to be trusted. Besides, you must have some assurance from him in connection with that for which you trust him. You cannot trust him to undertake for you in any matter without some engagement, more or less explicit, that he will faithfully attend to what you trust him for. Your trust, in short, must rest upon

his word. True, it ultimately rests upon himself. The person himself is always the object of your trust; but the foundation of this trust, the warrant upon which it builds, is his word of promise, his personal engagement. And Christian faith is quite analogous in this regard. It is not exercised blindfold. It is not exercised at haphazard, or at a venture. It is instructed, enlightened, intelligent, based on knowledge, on the knowledge of Christ as in every way worthy of being trusted,—"mighty to save"—"Immanuel," the God-man Saviour. The ground on which it trusts Him is, of course, His word, the gospel-promise of His faithfulness; but still it rises from His word of promise to trust Himself, to rest and repose upon Himself. Would you accept a bank-note, if you did not trust the bank?

I do not trust His word alone. I do not trust even His atonement alone, His righteousness, His blood, His grace alone. I trust Himself in virtue of His word, in virtue of His atonement, in virtue of His grace. I trust Him to do as He has said, to fulfil His word of promise, to pacify my conscience by the sprinkling of His blood, to clothe the nakedness of my demerit with the white raiment of His righteousness, to anoint my spirit-eyes with the eye-salve of His own Spirit that I may see. Yes, there is no true, vital, influential Christianity, no genuine, sincere, thorough, Christian discipleship to be found anywhere except in Christ, in Christ alone.

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find."

"Whom I have trusted," "Whom I have believed."

2. The other aspect of faith is quite as simple and explicit. According to the apostle, *the personal surrender or commitment of himself and of all his interests into the hand of Christ is the prominent distinction of it.* "That which I have committed unto Him." This expression, as it stands in the original, does not so much refer to the act as to the matter of commitment. It denotes the thing surrendered more than the deed by which it is surrendered. It may be literally rendered, as you may see on the margin of the revised version, "He is able to keep," or "to guard," "my deposit;" and this rendering, although covering the act of making the deposit, more immediately turns attention upon the deposit itself. The question is therefore at once suggested, What is this deposit?

Here again the language of the apostle is quite indefinite. But surely his idea is not indefinite. Though he does not name the deposit, there ought not to be the least dubiety about its reference. Nothing is more amazing than the extent to which preachers and expositors are at sea regarding it. It is said to denote his soul, his office, his ministry, his life, his labour, his salvation. From the marginal rendering in the revised version of the New Testament, it would appear that the revisers found some difficulty in determining whether it should be rendered, "That which he hath

committed unto me," or "That which I have committed unto Him." But why should these references be thus distinguished from one another in the import of the expression? The deposit unquestionably embraced himself in the totality of his being, life, and history, not merely his soul, or his salvation, or his work, or even his apostolate, but his entire self—body, soul, and spirit, with all the interests and concerns of his apostolical ministry and his personal immortality together.

That is not trust in Christ which fails to commit this great deposit in its entireness to His custody and guardianship. He that does not trust Christ in what concerns his body, how can he trust Him in what concerns his soul? He that trusts Him in what concerns his soul, how can he fail to trust Him in what concerns his body? The believer takes both personal interests —temporal, spiritual, and eternal—and public interests, Gospel interests, church interests, world interests, all interests together, and absolutely, unreservedly, makes them over to his Saviour, deposits them with Him, commits them to His custody, to His care. You have not learned Christ, and you certainly do not know Him, if you have not done *that.* You often trust an arm of flesh, why should you not trust the arm of our Almighty Saviour? He that believeth not hath made Him a liar. I speak this to your shame.

"Take, Lord, my soul and all its powers,
O take my memory, mind, and will;

Take all my goods, and all my hours,
Take all I know, and all I feel;
Take all I think, and speak, and do,
O take my heart, and make it new."

This may suffice for the faith of the textual reference, and the other attainment in this reference may be now considered.

II. The Assurance.

We must exercise the faith, but not to rest in as sufficient, we must labour after the assurance too; on no account must we allow ourselves to come short of making our calling and election sure. The two things are evidently distinct. There may be the faith without the assurance, but there cannot be the assurance without the faith. The one is the root, the other is the flower. The root may exist without the flower, but the flower cannot exist without the root. Faith says, "I have believed." "That which I have committed unto Him." Assurance says, "I know," "I am persuaded."

There is nothing in this expression of assurance like the outburst of a transient impulse, or the ebullition of a mere temporary excitement or enthusiasm. It is in every way, calm, sublime, noble, most worthy of the best consideration.

1. First of all, like the faith with which it is connected, *it is enlightened and intelligent, acquired and realized in the knowledge of Christ, in the personal*

acquaintance with Christ. There may be an assurance springing out of ignorance, or founded upon error or misconception; but surely nothing of the kind is either safe or reasonable. If the assurance does not obtain the suffrage of the understanding and the heart, it will never root itself in the ground-principles of our being; and, at the best, it must be unsubstantial and visionary.

Many are anxious to know *that* they have believed, and *what* and *when* they have believed. The assurance which they thus seek is one which is founded upon their own personal acts and exercises of memory, study, and self-consciousness. By the apostle all these considerations are, for the present, overlooked or set aside. They may have a certain relative interest and importance; but this interest and importance are quite subordinate.

Others seek after an assurance which is based upon frames and feelings, upon ecstatic impressions and sensations, perhaps upon dreams and visions, perhaps upon the suggestion and the sound of Scripture texts which have come to them in some chance sort of way, without regard to their contextual and proper meaning, or perhaps upon exercises and experiences, upon traits of personal character and deeds of personal conduct. Of all these considerations, there is nothing in the text, I will not say that they are alike, baseless and delusive. They may be of some value in their own place, at least some of them; but this place is quite subor-

dinate, and to make much of it would be a grand mistake, if not even worse.

I will shew you the more excellent way—the apostolical way. Like the faith of the text, this assurance centres in the knowledge of Christ—of Christ Himself. It is "the assurance of understanding" begotten and upheld by "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." "I know whom I have believed." I know Him from the Divine testimony to be One that I can be sure of. From the same testimony I know Him to possess a power, a love, a faithfulness, a character, of which I can have no suspicion, not a doubt. I thus know Him to be the Son of God, the Brightness of His glory and the express Image of His Person, co-essentially Divine, all-wise, almighty, and therefore infinitely able to do all that I trust Him for. I thus know Him to be the Christ; the Anointed of the Most Migh; the Sent of God; the Accepted of the Father in the covenant-mediatorship of redemption; and, therefore, entirely worthy of my perfect confidence. I thus know Him to have undertaken the cause of our sinner race in the counsels of peace; to have come into the world in the fulness of the time, made of a woman, made under the law; to have expiated our guilt; to have paid our debt; to have taken away our sin; to have satisfied Divine justice; to have brought in everlasting righteousness; to have obtained eternal redemption, not by the blood of others, but by His own blood, the all-meritorious atonement of His self-

sacrifice in life and death for us. I thus also know that He is now at the right hand of God as our Advocate and Intercessor within the veil, Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, and altogether able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, to give eternal life to as many as have been given Him. Thus I know Him; and the assurances of His word, upon the warrant of which I trust Him, are most satisfying, all-satisfying. He cannot belie His word. He cannot deny Himself. He will not disappoint any one. I have full assurance in Him. The hymn speaks of "venturing on Him," but there is nothing like a venture in the case. He is not slippery like ice. He is true as steel, and stable as the rock. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Yes, verily, "I know whom I have trusted,"—"whom I have believed."

This is the assurance that is worth the seeking, as worth the having. It is an assurance which, in the personal knowledge of Christ, depends immediately upon Christ Himself; upon His finished work; upon His faithful promise; upon His almighty power; upon His immutable character and glory — depends, I say, immediately, entirely, absolutely upon Himself, without anything in ourselves or of our own between. I do not in any way depreciate that assurance which is based upon the work of the Spirit in our personal experience of His sanctifying grace and power. But how often is this experience suspended,

or in some way obscured, by various influences, personal and external; and where, then, is the assurance which depends upon it? The assurance which holds direct of Christ Himself, and of which also He is Himself the Alpha and the Omega, the All in all, is the choice assurance, the non-such, peerless, transcendent, Divine assurance. An assurance dependent upon ourselves is, like ourselves, as fluctuating as the wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. The assurance dependent upon Christ, how preferable in every way, because steadfast and immoveable like a rock! "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord," "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung," "that I may know Him." Oh, there are worlds of golden meaning, of untold meaning in this simple "I know whom I have believed."

2. There is yet another element in the assurance of the text which requires attention. *It culminates in a full persuasion of Christ's ability to guard and keep with all fidelity to the very last the deposit which has been intrusted to Him.* How heroic the apostolical utterance of this persuasion. It is spoken out with voice of triumph. It is manfully pronounced as with trumpet sound on the day of battle. "And I am persuaded that He is able to keep," "to guard," "my deposit," "that which I have committed unto Him;" "that which He has committed unto me," "against that day."

Again, the language of the apostle is so far indefinite. He does not name the day to which he articulately refers. Yet which of us is at a loss to supply the omission? Who does not know the day in question? It is enough to say, "that day!" The very indefiniteness of the reference makes it the more emphatic. Everyone knows that it is the day of days—no common day—"the great day;" "the last day;" "the day of the Lord;" "the day of His glorious appearing," "of the appearing of His glory;" "the day of judgment," on which "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." And how shall we ever face that day? We know not when it may burst in upon us, whether at the first watch, or the second watch, or the third watch, at cock-crowing, or in the morning. Perhaps it may find us sleeping—sleeping our last sleep, from which there is no awaking till the heavens be no more. We may have put off this tabernacle, laid aside this mortal coil, seen corruption, and what can we do for ourselves then?

Paul was now ready to be offered. The day of his departure was at hand. In a few months, or perhaps days, his name would be added to the martyr-roll. And how did he comport himself with such a prospect? How did he view the issue in its relation to the Church of Christ, to the ministry of the gospel, to his own personal interests, to the salvation of his immortal soul? Oh! in what sublime majesty he here stands up before us, clothed in sunshine, the world

underneath him, and the crown overhead. All his interests are safe, the ministry he had received of the Lord, the gospel of the grace of God, which it had been his heart's joy to preach; his own soul, the redemption of which is so precious that no mortal man can pay a sufficient ransom for it. What a grand deposit he has made of them; he has committed this deposit to Christ; he has put it into the hand of Christ, not only "till that day," but "for that day," "against that day."

Thrice blessed they who have done so too, who have taken themselves, their lives, their souls, the very dearest of their treasures, be they what they may, "more to be desired than gold, than the most fine gold," and, according to the will of God as revealed in the word of the truth of the Gospel, committed them with all confidence to Christ, as unto a faithful Creator and merciful Redeemer. Oh, what a Custodier He, higher than the kings of the earth, mightier than all the principalities and powers of darkness. Never will He belie His responsibility. Every deposit He has received, every trust confided to Him, He will make good to the very utmost. Of all that has been given Him, and of all that may be given Him, He will lose nothing. Lord Jesus, undertake for me. Be Surety for Thy servant for good. Into Thine hand I commit my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, O Jehovah.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day;
For who aught to my charge shall lay?

Fully absolved through Thee I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame."

Now, by way of practical application,—and on your part this ought to be a most dutiful and prayerful self-application, — observe that *both the faith and the assurance are personal.* Read again the textual I's, — "I know," "I have believed," "I am persuaded," "I have committed." And let me ask you to take Paul out of them. He is beyond them now. He is done with them for ever. Put yourselves in them. They are of no use when he is no longer here, except as you take and make them all your own.

And observe again, of both the faith and the assurance, that *that they are alike of present exercise.* The faith is no doubt expressed in the past tense. It was not a new attainment of the apostle's; but still it was a present one. And so with the assurance. It is expressly instanced by him as an attainment of the present. The attainments of the past may be pleasant to look back upon, but they are not safe to rest upon. Past faith and past assurance will never serve instead of present faith and present assurance. The manna which fell around the tents of Israel was only available for the day. It came to them day by day. It was daily bread. I cannot live upon the memory of a faith and an assurance which I had yesterday, any more than I can live upon the probability of a faith and an assurance which I desire to have to-morrow. I need to

exercise a present faith. I need to possess a present assurance too.

And once more observe that, *both the one and the other are nothing without Christ Himself.* They are indeed ciphers apart from Him. Let Him stand before them, and they cease to be ciphers. They acquire a value as infinite as Himself. All eyes to Christ. All hearts to Christ. It is not by reflection, but by observation, that I perceive the external world around. You will never see anything by turning round your eyes in their sockets to look in upon your brain behind. Did you ever see a Christian looking Death in the face? Was either his faith or his assurance then exercised upon himself? Was not the one as well as the other engaged, engrossed, with Christ, with Christ alone? What a view he had of the blessed Saviour, how intensely vivid. You "thought,"—perhaps he also thought, like Peter when the angel brought him out of prison,—"that it was a vision." Neither you nor he "wist that it was true." But, "when he was come to himself," what a triumph in his dying testimony:—"Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel." "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God;" and, when you yourselves "had considered the thing," you understood it all.

Again I ring out the old martyr-words—"None but Christ!" "None but Christ!" The doctrine of Christ will not avail instead. I can never rest upon a creed,

however true. Even the word of Christ in this Holy Bible will not avail instead. How can I build for eternity upon a word-foundation merely? I need the Redeemer Himself, more than even His doctrine of redemption—the Saviour Himself, more than even His promise of salvation. I am most thankful for the balm of Gilead, but I do not know how I am myself to use it. Oh, for the good Physician to come in person with it for my cure! The All in all of faith, the All in all of assurance too, is none other than Himself. I will have no faith and no assurance, which may allow me to think that I can be safe in any other way than that of immediate and absolute dependence upon Christ, upon Christ alone. "In the LORD put I my trust." "Unto Thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul." Amen.

SERMON XIV.

THE SERVICE AND THE SLEEP OF THE FAITHFUL SERVANT.

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption." —Acts xiii. 36.

THE text occurs in Paul's famous sermon at Antioch. It is introduced by way of attesting the resurrection of Jesus Christ as having taken place in fulfilment of the prophetic Scripture. To deal with it in its textual connection is not the business we propose to ourselves at present. It can be readily enough isolated and considered as an independent passage, instructive in itself, and permanently charged with much that may be profitable in all generations or ages of the world. It forms a brief account of the life and death of David the king, the greatest of the sons of Judah, as summarised by Paul the apostle, the greatest of the sons of Benjamin, and it may be made, not unworthily, the subject of sanctuary-meditation.

These two things will therefore be now reviewed by us in turn—the life of David, and the death of David. It will be our endeavour to make the review practical in its bearing and its issue.

I. The Life of David.

How expressively and, at the same time, honourably to him, it is described. He served his own generation by the will of God. He proved to be a blessing in his day, fulfilling as he did the duty of his life and station well, to the great advantage of his compeers and contemporaries. Though raised in the sovereign providence and grace of God from the humble position of a shepherd, who had charge of his father's flocks, to that of a monarch over the favoured people of the Lord, he did not regard his elevation as merely of advantage to make men his slaves—the ministers of his ambition—the minions of his pleasures. He laid himself out—no doubt, with many shortcomings, "for there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not"—to further the well-being of those over whom he was set to govern. Nor did he do so in the way of pleasing himself, or carrying out his own personal designs. He served his own generation, but it was in the way of serving God. He was the servant of the people as their king, but it was as the servant of God that he performed his duty as their king. He accepted the law of God as the law of the kingdom. The will of God was his rule of duty. Yet, after all, his usefulness was not abiding. He did not continue by reason of death. He departed this life, and entered into rest, or, as it is here both aptly and finely put—he "fell on sleep."

Such is the account of David's life. It is very brief; but, brief as it is, it reads us a few lessons of telling import which we may with much advantage lay to heart, and practically carry out with no less advantage in our respective spheres of life.

1. For instance, *no one can be said to fulfil the duty of life who does not serve his own generation.* David's part in life is over. Great man though he was, his service is long since ended. We do not occupy his position, or anything like it; but we are living in our own generation, and what is the service we render to it may well be made a question. Be it that we do not exercise much influence as being in any way great; but how do we exercise such influence as we have? Greatness may be said to be very much an accident, it may be of birth, or it may be of circumstance. But usefulness is independent of greatness. In the everyday business of ordinary life, the copper pence of current circulation contribute more to the common good in the interchange of sale and barter than all the sovereigns of the mint, though made of gold. The world certainly owes far more to those who occupy no place in history than to those who do,—to countless hosts of obscurities who are unobtrusively serving their own generation with unspeakably greater effect and benefit in their disregarded spheres than to those who are the observed, and belike the praised of all, as magnates or as heroes in church and state. The wrong heads have much too often placed upon them laurels of distinction and crowns of glory.

Let us never think that we require to leave our vocation or our position in life to serve our own generation in a profitable manner. The children of Israel were commanded to abide every man by his own standard. There were to be no stragglers from their posts in the encampment of the congregation. "As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk." It belongs to magistrates to perform the duty of magistrates, to ministers of ministers, to tradesmen of tradesmen, to servants of servants, each in his own sphere, keeping his own place and doing his own work.

> "The claims
> Of social life to different labours urge
> The active powers of man; with wise intent
> The hand of Nature on peculiar minds
> Imprints a different bias, and to each
> Decrees its province in the common toil."

Traversing that province in the way of meddling with other people's business, or dabbling in other people's matters, or trespassing upon other people's fields of labour will never win for you from either God or man the character of usefulness. Do the work you are called to do.

A strong emphasis ought to be put on the words, "Served his own generation." Abraham did his duty as God and his own generation required of him. Moses and Samuel did theirs in turn; and David, as a man after God's own heart, had no less an understanding

of the times in which he lived to know what he himself as well as Israel ought to do in his and their respective circumstances. There are those among us who do little or nothing in the way of serving their own generation, because, as they complain, often in whining speech, nothing is done or can be done as in the past. But how can we serve as in the past any more than as in the future? Former generations will not come back, and future generations will not come forward, to be the better of us. Our own generation alone is present, and we ought to do our best for it as ourselves only in the present. Different modes of service are invariably required for different generations. David's sling and stone effectually prostrated the old Goliath; but they would have been very harmless against the all-murderous artillery of modern Philistinism. The military tactics and equipments of Alexander, Cæsar, and Napoleon would have been easily overmatched, and their legions put to rout in the battlefields of the present day. Just so within the religious sphere. One generation is encountered by superstition and idolatry, another by infidelity and rationalism, and yet another by error in doctrine and immorality in life; and the same instruments and weapons will not serve to meet and overthrow these various forces in their assaults upon truth and righteousness. The service of Abraham would have been of little avail in the days of Moses, and of as little would the service of Moses have been in the days of

Abraham. Elijah, with his zeal for the LORD God of hosts and faithful testimony-bearing against the sin of Israel, served his own generation well; but his service would not have answered to the requirements of the apostolic age, which obtained the very different gifts and services of other heroic men like Peter and Paul. Out upon the men, whether preachers or others, be they what they may, who cannot "discern the signs of the times," so as to act and serve accordingly, who do not "contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints," or otherwise "serve their own generation," "as the duty of the day,"—not the past day, or the approaching day, but the present day,—"requireth."

That we may be able to do but little in our own department and range of service is, no doubt, true. But "who hath despised the day of small things?" Assuredly the LORD has not. He is pleased with the love which creeps where it cannot go. "A word fitly spoken," be it only a word, "is like apples of gold in baskets of silver." "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." "He that hath not a lamb, let him bring a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons." "A man was famous according as he lifted up axes upon the thick trees." Step by step, if we do not wander from the way, or loiter on it, will carry us in time to our journey's end. At all events, the measure of our activity is determined, or ought to

be, by the ability that God has given us. The law of apostolical decision is quite precise:—"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith."

2. For secondly, *the service we render to our own generation ought to be religiously regulated by a dutiful regard to the will of God.* There is nothing like service on the part of any, except as it is done with an eye to the will of another. Let there be no submission to constituted authority or mastery in the case, and there is no service.

Many seem to think that the will of God bears exclusively on what belongs to strictly religious life, the devotion of the closet with the observance of the Sabbath, and other Scriptural ordinances. But "godliness is profitable unto all things." Religion should permeate our whole existence, govern every part of our life-business, of our life-duty. Look at Joseph, how he served the captain of the guard, the keeper of prison, and the monarch of the land, and how his entire service was carried out in a religious spirit, as one that lived in the fear of God. Look at Daniel and his companions in Babylon, how they also regarded the will of God in the duty of their station, and how on this account the king "found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." Our life must really be a failure if religion be absent from it. There is no situation that we fill, no business in which we are engaged, but what

should be governed by the will of God, by the fear of God. It is not the metal, but the die, that makes the coin. Let the mint issue any token stamped with the royal image and superscription, and it will go anywhere over the kingdom for current money. "Art thou called, being a servant? care not for it;" only make sure that you are the Lord's servant in being the servant of another. A tradesman, a merchant, any person professing godliness, that does not approve himself as true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report in all things connected with his vocation, whatever it may be, is a scandal to religion. John Newton used to say in his "Table Talk," "No Christian should plead spirituality for being a sloven; if he be but a shoe-cleaner, he ought to be the best in the parish."

That not a few succeed in the world without the fear of God, and that men praise them for doing well to themselves is true enough; but what moral bankrupts they are; in God's sight no better than paupers, more wretched than beggars. We ever ought to bear in mind that we are responsible, not for our devotion only, our Sabbath worship only, but for our everyday religion, and for the purity, the industry, the integrity of our work-day life and business in our ordinary callings and occupations. It is a good as well as an old saying, "That is not religion that is left behind us when we go out at the church-door." The question, "Who hath required this at your hand?" is enough

to condemn all will-worship; but how, at the same time, it as emphatically condemns all business of any and every kind together, however serviceable to our own generation it may appear to be, if it is not according to the will of God; and, when the question is put, as assuredly it will be to every one at last, it will go hard with any who have excluded God from their thoughts and ways, who have not concerned themselves to honour Him as All in all. Obscurity of station will not exempt either one or other from responsibility in the matter. A private in the ranks is as much sworn as the general of any of her armies, or the commander-in-chief of all, to serve Her Majesty. As little will social standing or quality, or if you will, lay calling, or civic office, or secular position of any kind be allowed to form any ground of exemption in a single case. David never preached a sermon; but, as the servant of God, he had to serve his own generation all the more and all the better, because he was a king. How touching the order of the Emperor that he should be prayed for, not as his Majesty, but as God's servant, since imperial rank is nothing, as he esteems it, except as a means to the performance of State duties. And "ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Is it not instructive to learn that it was in connection, not with His preaching or His praying, but with His laying down His life for the sheep that He said, "This commandment have I received of my Father"?

3. And now, thirdly, *our serviceableness to our own generation terminates with our life.* When we are gathered to our fathers, we enter into rest, as done with service. When standard-bearers fall, the standards are carried off by the enemy, or trailed and trampled in the dust, if not seized and borne aloft by the hands of other stalwart heroes. "'Moses, my servant is dead; now therefore arise,' Joshua."

No doubt the good as well as the evil that men do lives after them. It is truly said, "Our deeds are like our children that survive us." But then they are our children, not ourselves. Even the most obscure and uninfluential among us may be the means of beginning a train of influence which may yet reach the world's end, and abide for ever. David's psalms are still extant in all the spiritual and saintly sweetness of their reverent praise, but his living personality has gone elsewhere; he has passed away and is no more among us. Take even the most eminent and useful of our race that have ever lived, Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, Ezra and Nehemiah, James and John, Peter and Paul, with Luther and Calvin, Knox and Melville, Henderson and Chalmers, what part or portion have they any more for ever in anything that is done under the sun? The work they did is not dead: it is still continued and sustained by others, generation after generation, but they themselves are done with it: "they rest from their labours," though "their works do follow

them." What a contrast in the abiding influence of our Lord! He continues present to all generations, because, though once dead, He is alive again, to reign over the house of Jacob, not as David for forty years, but for ever, as the days of heaven, and as long as the sun and moon endure. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended. But the prayers of Jesus, the son of David, are not ended. The prayers, the intercessions of Jesus, the son of David, are from everlasting to everlasting.

Romanists maintain that saints in heaven may still exercise a gracious influence on present and future generations by continuous personal advocacy in spiritual being and activity on their behalf; and hence their invocation of saints according to the calendar of Papal canonisation. Why, they ask, should such be deprived in heaven of the privilege of offering up prayers for others, as they used to do on earth? Do we not find prayers in Scripture that were offered up and urged for David's sake, long after he was dead and buried? The fact is beyond dispute. Yet these prayers had reference, not to David personally, but to the covenant made with him, or to the antitypical David, the Messiah of the covenant; and besides, although it were certain that David and the saints of old were still prayerfully exercised on our behalf in heaven, this were no argument for invoking either him or them to help us individually or collectively by the intercession of their patronage or their prayers.

According to the explicit teaching of Holy Scripture, "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." The only Bible instance of intercessory prayer to a saint in heaven is that of the rich man in hell to Father Abraham; and, alas, for any warrant or encouragement that it affords in this connection. Abraham served his own generation; but in heaven his influence, though it may have a boundless field of exercise unknown to us, claims no part on this side the veil. Neither earth nor hell can be any longer the better of him, or of any like him. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

Done as we are with the life of David, we may now notice the next thing here.

II. The Death of David.

We cannot but be taken with this account of it. It is very briefly told, but the language in which it is expressed is most felicitous and heartsome. Some very instructive lessons may also be gathered from it.

1. *To the servants of their own generation by the will of God, death is equivalent or comparable to sleep.* So it is here and elsewhere delightfully expressed in Scripture. It may be allowed that the expression has been used from the earliest times outside the page

of revealed religion. It may, not improbably, be as old as the first instance of death itself. The old Pagan legend of Endymion as kissed by Selene into the sleep of an eternal youth would seem to indicate that it expressed a familiar enough belief within the bounds of heathendom. At all events, nothing could be more explicit than the textual reference, "Fell on sleep." And how exquisitely does our LORD avail Himself of its suggestive and most consolatory sentiment in the case of Lazarus, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." Not, "Our late friend," or "Our old friend," but simply, "Our friend,"—"Our friend still,"—"Our friend for ever." "He is not dead but sleepeth."

There are ever so many births in the household of God; there are added to it daily of such as shall be saved; but there are no deaths, no names blotted out of the family register or book of life. "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." It is "the God, not of the dead, but of the living" that says so; "for all live unto Him." "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours." Rest! Rest from the day's toils, from the life's labours, from the sins of the flesh, from the warfare of the spirit. How quietly and even cheerfully we retire to bed at night to obtain the repose and refreshment of "Tired Nature's sweet storer, balmy sleep;" and plainly we are here taught that

the dead in Christ are only sleeping, resting in their beds while in their graves, reposing in the life and love of God till the morning of a happy awakening in resurrection-glory. Look at Moses, when his work was done, how he went up to Mount Nebo, where he died and was buried by God in a sepulchre which no man knoweth unto this day. And look too at Elijah, the prophet of the LORD, when he cast off his mantle for Elisha to take and wear instead, how he was caught up in a chariot of fire by a whirlwind into heaven. They are no longer seen in the land of the living, or beheld by man with the inhabitants of the world. But the ages continue to roll round the wheels of time, and the history of long centuries is written out; when lo, they appear alive together, and both alive, on "the holy mount," "whether in the body, I cannot tell, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth." At all events, their sleep is over, and they are with the Lord, awake in glory, pattern and earnest surely of the resurrection-glory, when "them that sleep through Jesus will God bring with Him," and "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope." Does not every Christian instinctively echo the poet's wish? "Sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust, to approac the grave like one who wraps the drapery of his couch

about him and lies down to pleasant dreams." And oh, the comfort, the unspeakable comfort, to surviving friends of the Christian dead! What mother is not glad to put her child in its little cradle when it falls asleep? How she anticipates its waking all radiant in loveliest smiles. Let us so regard our Christian friends who have fallen on sleep. Let us not so much look backward as forward in connection with them. The retrospect may fill our eyes with unbidden tears, but the prospect is all joy and brightness. Hannah, why weepest thou? David, why is thy soul cast down?

> "Rests he not well whose pilgrim staff and shoon
> Lie in his tent—for through the golden street
> They walk, and stumble not, on roads star-strewn,
> With their unsandall'd feet?
>
> "Rests he not well who keepeth watch and ward,
> In sweet possession of the land loved most,
> Till, marshall'd by the Angel of the Lord,
> Shall come the Heaven-sent host?"

2. *It is a happy thing when the messenger of death finds us at work, or in the service of our own generation.* To die in harness is held to be eminently desirable, and the soldier who falls fighting for his country on the battlefield is said to be crowned with glory. When John Newton was advised, because of his age and infirmity, to give up his ministry, he exclaimed, "I cannot. What, shall the old African blasphemer stop preaching so long as he can speak?" I dare say you all know how it is related of a pious minister that,

on suddenly coming upon a member of his congregation who was employed in ditching or other bemiring work, the man apologized with a blushing countenance for his unkempt condition, when the minister quietly answered, "I hope that my Master at His coming will find me so well employed." "What! as I am?" said the man in great surprise. "Yes," was the reply, "faithfully performing the duties of my calling."

I am here reminded of "the venerable Bede," as he is usually called, when he lay dying in the monastery of Jarrow, with the monks standing tearfully by, while a young man sat at the bedside with pen in hand, ready to finish the translation of the Gospel according to John, into the Anglo-Saxon of the time, upon which Bede had been employed when prostrated by his last sickness. It was on Wednesday evening, the 26th of May 735, nearly twelve hundred years ago; and looking with sorrowful affection in the face of the old man, the amanuensis said, "Dearest master, there remains only one chapter to be translated, but the exertion is too great for you." "No, no," replied Bede, "it is easy; only lose no time; write quickly; for I know not how soon the Master will take me hence." Sentence after sentence was then feebly dictated, but at length the good man paused as quite exhausted. "Dear master," whispered the amanuensis, "there only wants one sentence more." Slowly and faintly it was dictated too, and the writer said, "It is finished." "That is true," said Bede again. "It is finished. Now, lift

my head, and hold me up, for, although I can no longer kneel, I may yet sit, and pray as I was wont to do." Then with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, he tried to sing the Gloria Patri, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," and, with the last word of the chant upon his lips, he fell asleep into the beatific vision of eternal life. Need I say, "Blessed is that servant whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing."

3. *And it is a comforting consideration that the death of the servants of God and of their own generation is ordered by the* LORD *as to both the period and the manner of it.* By some it is made a question whether the textual expression, "By the will of God," should be connected with David's service or David's death. That it should be preferably connected with his service approves itself to most; but it may be as well connected with his death; and anyhow, the truth expressed by this construction of it is incontestible.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." He never leaves it in any instance to the haphazard of contingency or chance. He rules the date, the place, the kind, the way of it according to His own will. Be it sudden or slow, by accident or disease, by the infirmity of age or some other way, all is ordered to even the minutest detail by the mandate of His own sovereign wisdom in providential dispensation. At all events, He never calls His witnesses to their rest till they have finished their testimony, or

any others of His servants home till they have accomplished as a hireling their day. Stephen may preach only one sermon before he suffers martyrdom; John Baptist may be slain by Herod after an active ministry of only a few months; even the ministry of the Lord Jesus may not exceed the period of three years when it is finished upon the cross; but we cannot charge God foolishly by saying that He has taken away any of them before their time, or before they have performed the service to their own generation which He has appointed to them. "There are many devices in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD, *that* shall stand."

And now, for a concluding sentence as to an obvious textual lesson of a practical nature, let me say in two brief words,—First, be loyal—loyal to the Master in obedience to His holy will; and secondly, Be useful—useful to your own generation in a dutiful and serviceable activity.

You are not here to serve yourselves. The mission of life has a far nobler end in view than that of your own indulgence or even advantage in the world. How could you expect to share the profits of a commercial firm without contributing capital or service in the co-partnery? Do you think that this world is a robber's cave, of which it is your business in life to discover the "Open Sesame" which will place its treasures at your disposal, so that you may retire from the toil of an everyday avocation, and surrender yourselves

to the ignoble indulgence of ease and pleasure? Would not this be to degrade and travesty your life, and, in fact, frustrate the very object for which God has called you into being and sent you here? The old proverb is every way as just as it is terse in its expression, "Self do, self have!" If you take your own way, you must look to yourselves for your reward. Think of those who have finished their course, and say whether, of the eminent in their day, such as followed their own will or God's will, as served themselves or their own generation, are now regarded as having made the best or the most of their opportunities and advantages in life, Saul or David, Erasmus or Luther, Napoleon or Washington? Anyhow, the words of the Master are most decisive: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Amen.

SERMON XV.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE.

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."—REVELATION vii. 9, 10.

THIS magnificent vision comes in between the apocalypse of the judgments of the seals, and that of the judgments of the trumpets. Scene after scene of terror and desolation had passed before the man of God, and the end was not yet. Other scenes, still more terrific and destructive, were about to arise before his view; but, as the sight of unmixed and uninterrupted judgment might have overwhelmed him, he is called aside to contemplate this scene of glory, in which it is disclosed that, during the successive periods of the accompanying apocalypse, the work of grace would continue to make progress under the reign of Christ—that, while other kingdoms might be overturned, and no place found for them, His Kingdom would remain as stable as the throne of God—and that, whatever plagues might ravage the world without, His ransomed people would have every blessing provided for them,

with constant access to His presence and fellowship in His love. I do not enter on any discussion of the locality of the scene exhibited in the vision. I believe that the vision pictures the characteristics of some illustrious epoch of the Church's history on earth. At the same time, I am persuaded that no one has ever turned upon it a contemplative eye without seeing it transfigured by a celestial irradiation into a still grander and more august Apocalypse, in which, as by the dissolving views of a diorama, he is transferred from earth to heaven, from grace to glory.

It is to the heavenly aspect of the vision that I wish you to lift up your eyes; and may the Lord impart to all of us that Divine illumination by which alone we can properly discern its splendours.

There are four things which we may particularly select and severally contemplate as of surpassing interest in the vision: the multitude—their position —their adornment—and their worship.

I. The Multitude.

The sight of a multitude is in its own way as attractive as a magnet; we run to see the object which has gathered it together, and this may very properly be done in the present instance.

1. *The vastness* of the multitude is most remarkable. "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude which no man could number." It was not always so. Of old, the

throne was here, and Him that sat upon it, as glorious then as now in His transcendent majesty, and every way as blessed in His independent all-sufficiency; but not one worshipper bowed down before Him; in all the illimitable amplitudes around, there was not so much as a single creature to do Him homage. Even after the morning-stars were made, and the sons of God began to people heaven, and to surround the throne in multitudes as countless as the stars, ages—cycles of ages—passed by before the sons of men had any representative among them in the immediate presence of the Throne. At length, earth sent its first pilgrim to the skies. The gates of heaven were opened, and a son of Adam entered on its untold felicity and glory. What a stir must have been produced by his arrival, for amid the celestial tribes he was without a mate—there was not another like him in all their countless throng. Yet, although a stranger, he was no intruder there. God smiled upon him as His first adopted son that had come home to glory. The Son of God rejoiced in him as the first-fruits of His mediation and the promised travail of His soul. And the angels too—doubtless there was great joy among them over him—the first saved sinner that had come from earth to share their home. But of the spirits of just made perfect, there was as yet not even one to welcome him by the name of brother; not lonesome was he; but, as a human being, he was alone.

Thousands of years passed on, and John was favoured

with constant access to His presence and fellowship in His love. I do not enter on any discussion of the locality of the scene exhibited in the vision. I believe that the vision pictures the characteristics of some illustrious epoch of the Church's history on earth. At the same time, I am persuaded that no one has ever turned upon it a contemplative eye without seeing it transfigured by a celestial irradiation into a still grander and more august Apocalypse, in which, as by the dissolving views of a diorama, he is transferred for his race to heaven, from grace to glory. [illegible] mother are at [illegible] and around, and around, are Enoch, who "walked with God," and Abraham, "the friend of God," and Moses, "the servant of God," and David, "the man after God's own heart," and all "the servants of God who had been sealed in their foreheads, the hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel,"—all the godly patriarchs, and all the holy prophets, and all the millions of departed saints of the former dispensation.

And then, Oh! how his eye glistened with still greater ecstasy as he descried a new train just entering glory with the Lamb as He had been slain going up before them; and among them Stephen whose face before the council was like an angel's, and his own brother James, who had been killed by Herod with the sword, and Paul and Peter, his dearly-beloved brethren and fellow-labourers,—and multitudes who had been brought to Jesus by their instrumentality

and his own, but who had predeceased him, and left Him behind, an old man of nearly an hundred years, yet a hopeful expectant of the same beatific glory. Then, besides, when he looked forward, he saw that no more than the first-fruits had been gathered in; for, as age followed age and generation succeeded generation, there still thronged "the bright celestial roads," and poured in at the golden gates new squadrons of happy spirits, all washed in atoning blood, and exulting in their Divine Redeemer, till, at the end of the days, the scene brightens into harvest; the whole field is white, and through the blissful period of millennial righteousness appears to be carried up almost entirely into heaven, where, at length, all are gathered, and eternity begins, and, there they are, "millions above all number infinite, the nations of the blest."

Turn aside and see this great multitude. Cast your eye abroad over this immense assemblage. Ah! there is but one eye that can take it in,—the LORD'S. "He counts the number of the stars;" and He alone can count the myriads of the redeemed, more than "the dew from the womb of the morning," or than "the stars of heaven," or than "the sand which is upon the seashore for multitude." What an uplifting view of heaven. Will any say in presence of it that but a scantling of our race will occupy the abodes of [illegible]? Multitudes are there; and as many more will [illegible] there. Why not you, and I, and all our friends? I know not how many more besides? Arise, and

yourselves from the dust. Strive to enter in at the strait gate; and in a little while you yourselves will be in the very midst of this mighty multitude.

2. But again, *the variety* of the multitude is no less remarkable than the vastness of it. "Of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues." There was a time when the sight of so miscellaneous a multitude in heaven would have been far from pleasing to the beloved John. In his earlier years, when he plied his humble craft on the Sea of Galilee, he had, with the bigoted exclusiveness of his race, been fond to think that heaven would be little else than Judea glorified, the peculiar paradise of the Jewish people. To him, as to his countrymen, the favourite idea of a state of glory was that of a place in Abraham's bosom; and there accordingly he expected to find not many more than were of Abraham's seed. By-and-bye very different sentiments possessed him; his mind had been enlarged by the grace of God; and for sixty years, and more perhaps, he had been a missionary of the cross in many lands, attesting the privileges of the Gospel to have been laid open to the acceptance of Jew and Gentile, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free, and effecting by the demonstration of the Spirit the conversion of multitudes among the nations from the service of idols to the service of the living God. And now that, in his old age, he was a weary exile in the mines of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, lo, the heavens were opened to him, and

he looked in upon the myriads before the Throne, and there, oh, blessed vision! he saw the representatives of every country, every complexion of the human countenance, every variety of the human race, swarthy Africans, and olive Asiatics, with fair-skinned Americans and Europeans of every name and nation, who had come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and sat down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

What a panorama! How catholic its view. How it expands the capacity and the expectancy of Christian hope. No country is so distant and no climate so unpropitious as to have no highway, no thoroughfare, between it and heaven. An avenue of communication has been opened from this world of guilt to yon world of glory, and signals of welcome are hung out, beckoning on men in every corner of the earth, and without regard to national distinction or diversified condition to go up thither; while, from the countless hosts who have already reached the happy land, the cry is raised and reiterated with all the earnestness of sinless love and pity, as new accessions from the Church below augment their number, "Be ye followers of us who through faith and patience inherit the promises!"

Who, where is he that, "like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming ever so wisely," steels his heart against the winsome influence of so gracious an invitation? What! is sin so pleasant, is the world so satis-

fying, that you can afford to forfeit the joys of heaven for either one or other? Or, do you indeed "desire the better country, even the heavenly," desire it as one who would be but a stranger here, and who dreads the very thought of being by any means a castaway? It is quite certain that you will not be disappointed in such a case. "God is not ashamed to be called your God; for He hath prepared for you a city," "the holy city, the new Jerusalem," so that, when you now lift up your eyes to this great multitude before the throne, you may at once begin to sing,—in full assurance of ere long sharing their felicity and glory,—"Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."

Let us now attend to what is next said of this great multitude.

II. Their Position.

The position of a multitude has not a little to do with the interest taken in it: and at any rate very much depends upon it here.

1. There is evidently a *transcendent honour* attaching to the position. They "stood before the throne."

Once a time they were far enough away. "Strangers and foreigners" they were; many of them sunk in the degradation and defilement of sensual heathenism; as many more of them living under the dark shade of a cold-hearted practical ungodliness; all of them in a state of penal as well as moral exile from the Lord,

who stood afar off, hid Himself, "dwelt in the secret place of thunder," "held back the face of His throne and spread His cloud upon it," so that, even when they thought of seeking Him, "if haply they might feel after Him and find Him," they knew not how or where to seek Him, they "groped as if they had no eyes; they stumbled in the noonday as in the night; they were in desolate places as dead men." Eventually, through the tender mercies of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, He made Himself known to them in his gracious character, and reconciled them to Himself by Jesus Christ, so that, from being far off, they were brought nigh, as nigh as it is possible for mortal flesh to bear.

Under the former dispensation, that in which John was educated, this propinquity was effected by the Divine inhabitation of the temple at Jerusalem, in the outer court of which the Jews were wont to present themselves and their sacrifices three times a year to God; while the priests daily approached with awe and reverence into the holy place, and the high priest once a year, with still greater awe and reverence, into the holiest of all, where the glory of the LORD was enthroned in the material symbol of the cloud above the mercy seat and between the cherubim. The economy to which John had been introduced by "the Revelation of Jesus Christ," brought him still nearer to the Throne. Himself a living temple, consecrated and occupied by the Eternal Spirit, and a royal priest offering up

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, he was brought very near indeed. A nearer approximation on earth there is not, and there cannot be. God dwelt in him, and he dwelt in God. The highest sense in which any can draw near to God is in reserve for the future state. The apostle obtains a vision of it. His eyes are enabled to penetrate the screen which separates earth from heaven; and there, afar off, he descries the great white throne, and the great "I Am" upon it, no more concealed by a "pavilion of dark waters and thick clouds of the skies," but ineffably effulgent in the visible "Brightness of His glory and the express Image of His Person; while, in His immediate presence, with capacities divinely invigorated and expanded for its full enjoyment, stand in all the ecstasies of celestial rapture the myriads of the redeemed.

Oh, how eminently exalted the distinction! Admission to the presence of the sovereign, and a station before the throne is the highest honour that is competent to the subject of an earthly kingdom. "Happy are thy men," exclaimed the Queen of Sheba when she beheld King Solomon in all his glory—"Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom;" and again, of the seven princes of Persia and Media which sat the first in the kingdom, it is said that they "saw the king's face," or had access at pleasure into the royal presence,—a privilege quite

unique. But to stand before the Throne of heaven—and this so near as to behold with open face and without a glass or intervening medium, the glory of the LORD—the position has no analogy, and there is no describing of it. Even the most exalted ideal of it that can be framed in the pictorial creations of the sublimest imagination but derogates from its glory—is as much beneath it as the earth itself is beneath the heavens. Let faith be content to wait in the still expectancy of reverent hope for the substantial realisation of it. For the present, it is enough to know that it is immediate, without veil; intimate, without distance; uniform, without interruption; and completely satisfying, without end.

2. And then, besides the honour of this position, a *superlative happiness* is alike connected with it. "They stood before the throne and before the Lamb." For this is the distinguishing feature of the vision, which must have commended itself most of all to the ecstatic mind of John. Apart from the mediatorship of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, there had been neither honour nor happiness in the position of this multitude. It was the presence of Him on whose breast the beloved disciple had been wont to lean in confiding love that made the scene appear to him a happy heaven. It would have been no heaven at all had he not seen His beloved Master there in all His glory. The abrogation or even suspension of the mediatorial economy would have certainly dispossessed it of

all blessedness for Him. But oh! how bright the hope, how ecstatic the joyous feeling, which must have thrilled him when he perceived that all the communications between the Source of Love and those who drank of its living water passed through the personal mediation of the Lamb.

I repeat it, This is what constitutes the blessedness of heaven: all gracious benediction from the Father to the glorified, and all grateful benediction back again from the glorified to the Father, meeting in the Person of the Mediator in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily: never a smile beaming from the Throne but as it radiates from the countenance of Jesus Christ, and never a song reaching the Throne but as it goes up through Him again. Yes, just as here on earth, so up in heaven, and there eternally, the blessed and the blessing sight of God is in the face of Jesus Christ, the only one eternal Mediator. If ever you and I get so far or high, we shall most truly find it so, find that it is in immediate, intimate, and endless fellowship with Him, and God in Him, that we attain to that perfection of exercise and of enjoyment by which all are distinguished there. The prayer of Jesus will there obtain its answer to the very letter, to the very full: "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." *

* John xvii. 24.

The next outstanding trait in the tableaux of the vision is now before us—

III. Their Adornment.

1. Here that which first attracts our notice is *the spotless purity* of the adornment. They "stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes." By this is doubtless meant "the righteousness of the saints," the vesture of "fine linen, clean and white," the snowy stole of royal priesthood, the court-dress of heaven, the only costume allowed to be in fashion there. Who would think that those who are thus attired in this array, so clean, so pure, so white, that no angel in heaven wears a cleaner, or a purer, or a whiter, were once sinners on earth, having no better than "filthy rags" for raiment, so very filthy, that when they tried, as laboriously they often tried to wash them in snow-water and with nitre and much soap, they could not make them clean; iniquity was still marked upon them before the Lord? Yet so it was. Greater sinners are not now on earth than were many of them when here; the chief of sinners, the vilest of the vile were they. Nay, go round that countless multitude, and this one confession you will get from all, without so much as one dissentient voice, "We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

I need hardly say that it was not after they had

gone to heaven that they were cleansed and clothed in their beautiful garments of spotless purity. Born of water and of the Spirit, and believing on Jesus the Lamb of God; while they were yet in the Church below, the saving change was wrought upon them here and then; the righteousness of their Surety-Redeemer was here and then imputed to them, and they were justified in Him; the grace of the Holy Spirit here and then took possession of their heart, and evinced its sanctifying operation in their whole deportment. Still, from various causes, originating mainly in themselves, the whiteness of their new clothing did not on earth so visibly appear. It was not so clearly discernible either by themselves or others. Remaining unbelief, indwelling sin, and its occasional outbreaking in their external conduct, obscured its lustre. But behold them now, as John beheld them, when they thronged the palace-court of the New Jerusalem, the moon walking in her brightness is not so fair, the sun shining in his strength is not so bright as those robes of theirs; all fair, all white, visibly, illustriously, gloriously white; "white as snow," without spot or blemish; "white as the light," without impurity or corruption; "white and glistering," with unsullied radiance, with unspotted splendour, with unclouded brightness.

Brethren! you desire to join this white-robed multitude when God may call you hence. I know you do. But you must be sprinkled with the same blood, and you must be sanctified by the same Spirit. "These

are they which have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne." "Therefore!" Yes, and this same "therefore" must hold in your case as well as theirs. "There is a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness," a fountain filled with the sin-cleansing blood of atonement-sacrifice; go and wash therein; or go with David's prayer to Him who is there to wash you, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

2. The next thing in the adornment of the multitude is *its triumphal character.* "Clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." On earth they were on battle-ground. From first to last it was a place of warfare to them. And the conflict was hard enough. Sometimes they were brought to the ground, wounded sore, and trodden under foot. And often had they to complain, as "fightings without and fears within" thickened fast upon them: "How are my foes increased!" Nor did they "rest from war," till, like the Israelites, they had fought every inch of ground on the march to take possession of the promised land. Oh, how grateful the peace of heaven to these long-tried and war-worn soldiers! There are no fields of battle yonder. They are beyond "the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls." Every enemy,—sin,—Satan,—the flesh,—the world,—all are vanquished.

With no temptation to encounter, and no corruption to subdue, and no persecution to endure, they enjoy the fruit of a complete and most gladsome conquest.

Let us, with John, behold them as revealed to our admiring view in this heavenly vision. Where are the ugly wounds and the garments rolled in blood with which they went up from fighting the battles of the LORD? Lo, there is not a scar upon their persons, not a spot of gore or dust upon their garments; not a vestige, not a trace, of their agonism remains. They are conquerors, and more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. Their armour, their accoutrements and weapons, "the breast-plate of righteousness," "the shield of faith," "the helmet of salvation," and the "sword of the Spirit," are laid aside as no longer needed, or are hung up on heaven's walls to serve as memorials of their conflict; and wearing only the garments of peace and purity, with the insignia of their triumph,—the white robes and the victor palms,—there they commemorate the praises of the Lamb by whom they have overcome.

We come now to the last thing we have to look at in this great multitude.

IV. THEIR WORSHIP.

This is worship in song, and it perfects the apocalyptic diorama of the vision.

1. And first, *the song* of their worship is replete with interest.

Observe *the subject of it.* Delightful subject! Most blessed theme of praise! "Salvation!" Of this the Church on earth has always sung. It was the song of Moses: "The LORD is my Strength and Song; and He is become my salvation." It was the song of David: "The LORD is my Rock, and my Fortress, and my Deliverer; the God of my Rock; in Him will I trust. He is my Shield and the Horn of my salvation." It was the song of Mary: "My soul doth magnify the LORD, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." It was the song of the Lamb which all the ransomed of the LORD were wont to sing in their retirements, families, social meetings, and public assemblies, while they passed through this vale of tears on their way to the heavenly Zion. And when assembled at length in heaven, and knowing in a glorified experience the full blessedness of salvation, what wonder that John heard the great multitude still harping the same melody, still singing the same song, and this not merely at the first blush of joy which animates their spirits as they enter glory, but with undying freshness for ever and ever?

Observe too *the object of it*—the true object, the exclusive object of religious worship. "Our God which sitteth upon the Throne and the Lamb." On earth there are so many claiming the name of Christian who seek to divide the honour of salvation between God and themselves; and also so many more who look to saints and angels to do the work which they cannot

trust to the grace of God and the merit of the Lamb. But when John looked in on heaven, and cast a scrutinising glance over the vast assemblage before the throne, he saw that it is there, as it ought ever to be here ; image-worship—saint-worship—virgin-worship —angel-worship—there is nothing of the kind; God in Christ as the God of salvation is the one object of their worship; in Him they had placed their confidence, and well-placed it had been; the mercy, grace, and faithfulness of God through the mediatorial merit of the Lamb could not—did not fail them; and oh! as they gaze on the Eternal King in the beatific vision of that manifested Person, and sacrificial merit, and almighty power before which they stand, how they pour forth the tribute of their overrunning gratitude in jubilant song; " the empyrean rings with halleluiahs," rivalling angelic harmonies, almost excelling the seraphic choirs.

2. And, again therefore, not the song of their worship only, but *the service* of their worship is replete with interest.

Observe *the fervour of it.* " And cried with a loud voice." Nothing now of the unsteady, chequered, and often melancholy experience of earth, when sometimes they hung their harps upon the willows, and sat down like Israel by Babel's streams, and sighed and wept in the bitterness of speechless sorrow; and at other times, as they got somewhat above this desperate sorrow, and did sing the Lord's song even in this foreign land, they

sang it in but feeble—oh, how feeble!—broken—hoarse —discordant—almost quite tuneless voices. There, as John looks up and listens to the voice of praise and melody from their lips, they lift up the new song with strength; and the exultant shout which bursts so simultaneously from the lips of all when they enter in through the gates into the city never dies away in other exercises and employments as eternity rolls on its ample round, but gathers ever-increasing vigour and ever-freshening ardour world without end.

And observe too *the harmony of it.* "And cried," "the great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues;" and the listener did not hear a discordant note. For indeed, with all their vastness and variety, but one mind, one heart, one soul animates the unnumbered throng; not an erroneous view exists in a single breast; not a jarring sound disturbs the tune of the mighty anthem, as was the case on earth, when, through misconceptions and misconstructions not a few, and jealousies and even heresies perhaps as many, they so often stood aloof from one another in most unfriendly and unlovely separation; "ten thousand thousand are their tongues, but all their hearts are one," and the symphony is complete; every melody of the concert is in unison with the whole.

Now, then, what ground of comfort have we here provided in respect of our departed Christian friends! Think of the glory into which these friends have

entered. Think of their blessed company; the myriads of the redeemed; the holy angels; the blessed Saviour; the eternal God. Think of their honour and their happiness, their exercises and enjoyments, no longer burdened with corruption; no longer racked with pain; no longer oppressed with sorrow, but enrobed in spotless purity, and waving their triumphal palms, while singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb in the rapturous fruition of the beatitudes of glory, not "almost well," as Richard Baxter said of himself when dying, but altogether and for ever well. And who would wish them back from the harbour to the storm; back from heaven's rest to earth's battle; back from the sweets of Paradise, from the rivers of celestial pleasures, to the sufferings of time in this vale of tears? "I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the LORD from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." "WHEREFORE comfort one another with these words."

What, still sad and downcast? "Why make ye this ado and weep?" "Woman, why weepest thou?" "Hannah, why is thy heart grieved?" "David, why is thy soul cast down?" Is it with you as with Beza when he said, on hearing of Calvin's death, "Now is heaven more dear, and death less dreadful;" or, as with the dreamer who, after seeing Christian and Hopeful cross the river of Death, and enter into the

Celestial City, tells us, "Now, just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and behold, the city shone like the sun, the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men with crowns upon their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to praise withal; there were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, Holy, holy, holy is the LORD; and, after that, they shut up the gates, which, when I had seen, I wished myself among them"? And who would not wish himself among them?

> **"Life, take thy chance; but oh! for such an end."**

You wish it. I wish it. We all wish it. It is so natural to wish it. Yes, but

> **"Wishing, of all employments, is the worst;**
> **Wishing, that constant hectic of a fool!"**

There is Balaam wishing, wishing, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." But wishing did not save him from dying in his sin. And there is neighbour Pliable, when he heard of "the endless kingdom," and "everlasting life," and "crowns of glory," and "garments that will shine as the firmament of heaven," and "no more crying nor sorrow," and the company of "seraphim and cherubim," and thousands and ten thousands walking in the sight of God, and standing in His presence with acceptance for ever, the hearing of these things ravishes his heart, and he mends his pace to go faster than even Christian

can; but ah! that slough into which he falls so soon extinguishes his ardour, and he is away back again to be seen no more in the company of the pilgrims.

Brethren, will Pliable's case and Balaam's case be yours? What will it be to have heard of heaven, its delights, its honours, its melodies, its glories, if the burning lake, the blackness of darkness, the worm which dieth not, the fire which is not quenched, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, be your portion at the last, your doom for ever? "Said I not unto thee, That, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Yes, "Believe!" It is not wishing, but believing; as an old writer says, "Make that knot sure, and Heaven itself is sure." Pray for the spirit of faith, meditate on the warrant of faith, look to the Object of faith; endeavour honestly and sincerely and presently the actings of faith; so will you gain the hope of heaven, and a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light; and, when these are gathered in the heaven of heavens, you will not be absent from the blessed company; you will stand on the sea of glass; you will have the white robes, the triumphal palms, and the golden harps to praise withal; you will be ever with the Lord.

"We speak of the realms of the blest,
Of that country so bright and so fair,
And oft are its glories confessed;
But what must it be to be there!

We speak of its anthems of praise,
With which we can never compare

The sweetest on earth we can raise;
But what must it be to be there!

We speak of its service of love,
Of the robes which the glorified wear,
Of the Church of the first-born above;
But what must it be to be there!

Do Thou, Lord, 'midst pleasure or woe,
Still for Heaven our spirits prepare;
And shortly we also shall know
And feel what it is to be there." Amen.

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